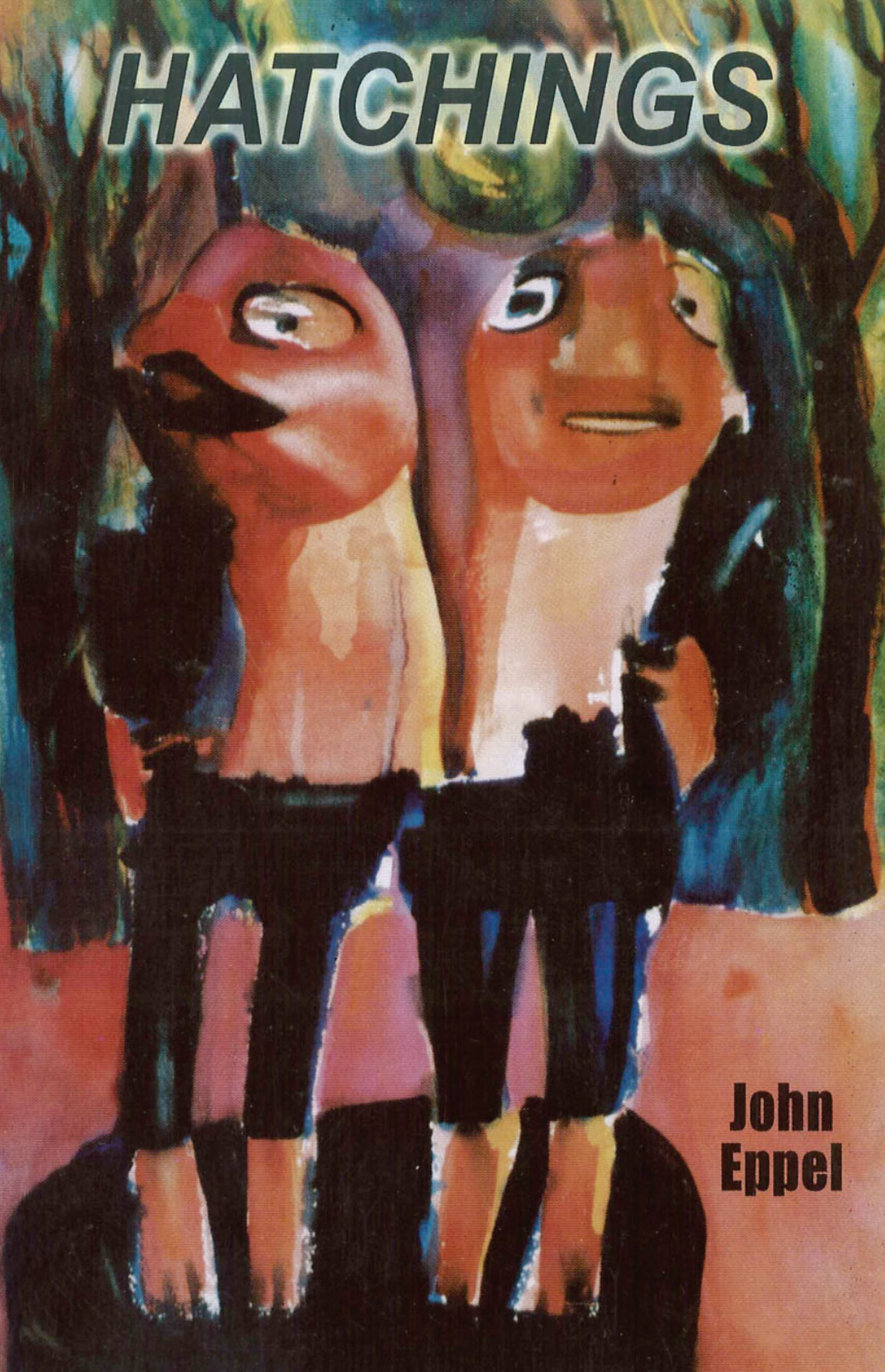


HATCHINGS

The book cover features a stylized, painterly illustration of two anthropomorphic birds. The bird on the left is reddish-pink with a black mustache and is looking upwards and to the left. The bird on the right is a lighter, peachy color and is looking upwards and to the right. Both birds have large, expressive eyes and are wearing dark, possibly black, pants. They are standing on a dark, shadowed ground. The background consists of dark, vertical, brushstrokes that suggest a forest or a cave. The overall style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century modernist painting.

**John
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Hatchings

For Sabine

John Eppel lives in Bulawayo, where he teaches English at Christian Brothers College. He was awarded the Ingrid Jonker Prize for his first poetry collection, *Spoils of War*, and the M-Net Prize for his first novel, *D G G Berry's The Great North Road*.

Spoils of War, Carrefour (1989)

D G G Berry's The Great North Road,

Carrefour/Hippogriff (1989)

Hatchings, Carrefour (1993)

The Giraffe Man, Queillerie (1994)

Sonata for Matabeleland, Snailpress/Baobab Books
(1995)

Selected Poems 1965-1995, Childline (2001)

The Holy Innocents, 'amaBooks (2002)

The Caruso of Colleen Bawn and Other Short Writings,
'amaBooks (2004)

Songs My Country Taught Me, Weaver Press (2005)

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Hatchings

John Eppel

with an introduction by Khombe Mangwanda

'amaBooks



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The characters and institutions in this novel are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead and institutions active or defunct is purely coincidental.

Introduction

In John Eppel's *Hatchings*, gone is the narrative of the Rhodesian nation of Eppel's first novel *The Great North Road*. Gone too is the distance that separated white 'Rhodies' from the 'natives'. More representative of the nation, the characters in this novel are from all races and walks of life. *Hatchings* is also different from *The Great North Road* in that Eppel presents to the reader a community divided along ethical lines, and occupying spaces that, for convenience, are referred to here as positive space and negative space. Consistent with this cleavage between good and evil, Zimbabwe is presented as functioning both as a site of regeneration and as a den of crime.

In *Hatchings*, the positive or 'sacred' space is associated with the Matopos National Park, with the children, the novel's heroine Elizabeth Fawkes, and with the Asil Khan egg. Appropriating ennobling mythic properties, these elements conjoin to create a timeless, classic space, the panoramic dimension of which serves to oust the narrowly historicized spatial 'scenery' of *The Great North Road*. Indeed, the connection of positive space and the Matopos is established early in the narrative of *Hatchings*, which appropriately unfolds with the Fawkes family on a campsite in the Matopos National Park. Presented as a place of extraordinary natural beauty, the Matopos National Park offers scenery that is experienced by the Fawkes family, and especially by Elizabeth, as refreshing both physically and psychologically, not least because of its mythic tradition.

It is significant that Eppel should set two major episodes of his novel at this locale. Indeed, the Matopos is the scene for both the negotiation on New Year's Day between Elizabeth Fawkes and her father for the hatching of the Asil Khan egg, and the site for the actual hatching of the egg. Thus, part of Eppel's strategy is to appropriate the holiness, the regenerative creativity and the fertility associated with this place and to impart it to the character of Elizabeth in her role of 'hatcher' of a new nation-building ethos.

The inscription of the Matopos as a symbol of regeneration is also achieved by reference to the water motif. The contrast between the Matopos and the rest of the country is figured in terms of the contrast between a place where water is available and where it is not. Repeatedly in the novel the importance of water in an otherwise drought-stricken country is emphasized. Just as Eppel's novel offers a dual representation of Zimbabwe so, too, it allegorizes water in a dual function: as a symbol of the rebirth of the new nation, but equally as a symbol of corruption. This duality in the symbolism

of water emerges throughout the novel. The effectiveness of the negative symbolism of water is brought home by its association with bodily waste and corruption. The smell that pervades Twots's house on New Year's Day is figured as symbolic of the degeneration associated with those Bulawayo residents who could afford water. The references to smell and faeces in the episode are reminiscent of Ayi Kwei Armah's depiction, in his novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, of the smell that accompanies the minister Koomson as he escapes arrest through the latrine at the Man's house. In that episode Armah evokes the olfactory senses and uses images of 'shit' to suggest that the process of decay in Ghana has reached the point of no return. Similarly the Twots's house is figured as a place of decay.

The conversation between Elizabeth and her mother about the significance of water in religion sheds light on Eppel's reference to water in order to suggest the double image of the nation his text conveys. Statements from the mythologist Mircea Eliade, which permeate this conversation, validate the representation of water at the Matopos Dam as a symbol of regeneration, and that of water at the Twots's house as a symbol of degeneration and death. The notions of historicity and its double relation to sacredness and profanity, transposed into the context of Eppel's representation of the post-colonial Zimbabwean nation, also underscore his attempt to provide a meeting space for those forces of darkness and light which the novel presents as shaping the two spaces of the post-colonial Zimbabwean society in the novel.

In Eppel's text, the extreme of corruption is embodied by Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikerhothi's crime syndicate and it is on Elizabeth Fawkes that the positive expectations are centred. Elizabeth's hatching of the Asil Khan egg is thus rationalized as the crossing over to a new moral order and a new culture.

While the space occupied by Elizabeth and the children is represented as positive, the 'nocturnal forces' occupy a space dominated by the underworld, which, as stated above, is presented as a negative space. Within the narrative discourse this latter space is inscribed as 'Other' in the sense that it disrupts the post-colonial economy of nation building. As one reads the novel, there is an inevitable impression that Eppel sides with the 'sacred' and invites the reader to witness the pollution emanating from the negative space and invading the positive space. The first manifestation of this invasion occurs when Nightingale Macimbi, one of the children, discovers a parcel containing the dead body of a baby. In the passage describing Nightingale's

discovery, there is a sense that the discovery is equated with the loss of innocence. Eppel's inscription of this invasion into the children's universe underscores the corruption that invades the national space, striking as it does in this instance the most vulnerable members of the society.

Two other incidents concerning the dumping of dead bodies emphasize the shock that accompanies the discoveries and reveal the extent to which corruption has eroded the fabric of society. When another dead baby is discovered in a dustbin outside the Prince Charming High School girls' toilets, police investigations reveal that fourteen other girls 'were either pregnant or had recently given birth'. As in the case of the incident involving Nightingale Macimbi, with the discovery of the dead baby's body in the school premises, the narrator locates another invasion of death at the heart of what should be regarded as a citadel of learning and culture, as well as of innocence. In this way the presence of dead bodies on the school premises also becomes a metaphor for the moral corruption that plagues the post-colonial nation.

In this regard, it can be argued that the school is used as a cameo of negativity which undermines the regeneration motif. All four schools referred to in the novel serve to illustrate that there is something 'rotten' in the nation-state of Zimbabwe. While Prince Charming is notorious for the high number of pregnant girls, another school, Kipling Primary, is depicted as a den of corruption. The reader learns that one of the teachers, Comrade Iyapipi, 'regarded fornication with his pupils as a perk and not as rape'. The headmaster too is found wanting; he is portrayed as incompetent and too politically oriented for the good of the school. But beneath the political face the headmaster wears is a corrupt individual. Cast in this light, the school appears to be the institution that corrupts or pollutes the innocence of youths instead of relaying the new moral ethos that, the novel posits, is so needed by the nation for its survival.

Another school, Black Rhino High, is depicted as a metaphor for retrograde conservatism. The narrator describes it as 'a school which would ensure that the high standards of Rhodesian education - the highest in Africa, if not in the entire world - would be maintained'. Ironically, the description of the activities of the school's sponsors - some of them are identified in the novel as 'sleeping partners' of Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi's crime syndicate - and the close link the school maintains with the notorious Blood of Jesus Temple - provide another window for the reader to glance at the corruption this school also embodies. Thus, through Black Rhino, education

per se is exposed in Eppel's text as an evil legacy of the past. Here, there is a clear relation between the history of colonialism, dead bodies, the physical locality of the school, predatory teachers, corrupt parents and imagining the nation in *Hatchings*. All these elements conjoin to reinforce the image of Zimbabwe as a nation in need of moral salvation, so much so that its very foundations (the family and the school) are presented as reeking of decadence.

The most prominent occupant of the negative space is Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi. A member of an anarchistic ('Jogskyite') movement, he is supposed to have coined the slogan 'One settler, one bullet'. It is significant that his crime syndicate enjoys the service of prominent members of the settler group, ranging from radical leftists to bourgeois capitalists. The novel points to drug smuggling as one of his syndicate's main activities, thus suggesting the extent of the physical and mental pains it inflicts on the Zimbabwean people.

Perhaps most significant is the suggestion that the syndicate's activities are facilitated by the willingness of the larger population to use its services, which, in turn, reinforces the view that the nation is rotten to the core. What can be seen in the underworld ruled by Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi is its power to wreak havoc on the nation. Indeed, one can evaluate the power of this mafia-style underworld through the way he controls political and economic power. He holds in his power most of the influential members of the community.

The portrayal of Moral MacBraggart as equally corrupt, despite being a church leader, and his Blood of Jesus Temple as a site of corruption and a bastion of conservatism in Zimbabwe, is a further instrument in Eppel's construction of the corrupt community of the nation. Under the façade of religion, the church operates as a business venture. In *The Great North Road*, where Moral MacBraggart and his church are introduced for the first time to Eppel's readers, he is seen as using tricks, blackmail and his eloquence to persuade disillusioned 'Rhodies' to join his church. In *Hatchings*, the church is described as having conservative political as well as capitalist leanings. It is right-wing, with an exclusively white congregation, materialistic, and modelled on the most conservative American churches.

There is a parallel between Moral MacBraggart and Sobantu Ikherothi in regard to the hold they have on their followers. Eppel portrays MacBraggart's congregation as loyal if naive. These sheeplike followers would do anything to please their spiritual leader for, in their eyes, he stands

as a go-between between God and material possessions. Thus, by casting The Blood of Jesus Temple in the role of spiritual refuge for the rich and corrupt, Eppel has created another symbol that allows him to highlight the tension between the two components of the nation.

It is telling that the crime syndicate is presented as the offspring of a South African refugee and that some of its main operatives and sympathizers are immigrants who have joined forces with a section of the local population from the public and business sectors as well as from the Church. With the inclusion in the text of these migrant intellectuals, Eppel seems to have constructed Zimbabwe in the image of the modern nation expounded by the likes of Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie, without necessarily subscribing to all its characteristics. Although the border zone the novel depicts is certainly a space of encounter between different cultures, it is clear that the characters involved in this encounter represent the worst of their communities of origin so that the end result of this confluence of aberrant 'cultures', sanctioned as it is in this text by the apparent blurring of boundaries between the immigrant and the local community that is involved in the crime syndicate's activities, becomes the antithesis of the cultural hybridity, which Bhabha posits takes life at 'the borderline community of migration'.

Not only the usefulness of the immigrant community in promoting progress and development in Zimbabwe is sharply interrogated, and the research conducted by the foreign researchers is sarcastically reported, but Eppel unequivocally indicts the contribution of immigrant intellectuals to the re-vitalization of the Zimbabwean national culture to the point of pathos. The mention in the novel of the generous financial assistance allocated to these projects indicates that Eppel considers as problematic the willingness of Western governments and aid organizations to fund such projects, which ultimately not only perpetuates an obsolete image of the African and encourages the exploitation of the African continent but also guarantees the survival of those doing 'research' in the field. Thus Eppel's novel is critical of the discourses of assistance to development. The alert reader would also see in it the terms of his subversion of the so-called Third-Worldism of leftist political and educational institutions from the West.

Thus, *Hatchings* highlights the danger to the nation of a culture of crime and proposes to the reader a choice between the moral dimension of a national vision and its opposite. Although clearly concerned with the corruption that characterizes modern Zimbabwe, the novel is ultimately

optimistic as it suggests that a real conversion to moral national politics is possible and that, despite the rampant corruption, the new society bears in itself the seeds of its own regeneration.

Eppel's work exudes a deep love for his country, and particularly his native Matabeleland, and also a deep concern for its postcolonial situation. His satire is directed not at individual characters *per se* but at representatives of colonial or postcolonial national culture. Part of his novelty thus has to do with his representation of Zimbabwe as a space wherein the various cultures of the nation interact with one another and, particularly, with his attempt at undermining difference. His work introduces a new perspective in Zimbabwean literature as it blends images of the past with concerns about dislocation in a society marked by the new power relations between racial groups. He adopts stances that mirror the divided soul of white Zimbabwe and the relation of settler history to the present and future of Zimbabwe.

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Chapter One

Elizabeth Fawkes was turning sixteen. She was going into her Lower Sixth year at a co-ed private school called Black Rhino High. She was a scholarship case.

Initially, the Board who started the school wanted to call it White Rhino High but the Ministry of Education, according to Board Member and garage owner, Strontium Twot, accused them of racism. This was in 1986, when the school opened its doors, in competition with established institutions like Falcon College and Girls' College, to those sons and daughters of businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants who could afford the astronomical fees. The school badge had been designed by the wife of another Board Member, a commercial pangolin farmer called Sudbury Bauls, an immensely rich man who had provided most of the finance to start the school - a school which would ensure that the high standards of 'Rhodesian' education - the highest in Africa, if not in the entire world - would be maintained. Sudbury himself had been educated at Pawpaw School in Matabeleland, where he had distinguished himself in those aspects of Rhodesian education that mattered: rugby, water polo, bullying, and geography. He was adamant that his own children, Zayne, Drakensberg and Lace, would enjoy similar standards in independent Zimbabwe. It was largely through the efforts of Sudbury Bauls and his profoundly religious wife, Matilda, that Black Rhino High had come into existence and that, in a few short years, it had become one of the most sought-after schools, if not in the world, certainly in Bulawayo.

It had been Matilda's privilege and pleasure to design the school badge. She prayed to Jesus for inspiration, and came up with the motto: 'To Them That Have Shall Be Given'. The colours she chose were red, orange and, with great reluctance, black. She, it was, who had initially mooted the white rhino. It seemed such an appropriate symbol for the fast dwindling white citizens of Zimbabwe. It wasn't a question of being racialistic. Not at all. But you know what these people are like. Blame everything on the Europeans. No, it was this animal's - one of the Big Five, mind you - strength, courage and endurance; its... yes, why not? its 'whiteness', and its being threatened with extinction. It was these qualities of the white rhino - not its stupidity, its ugliness, and its enormous sexual appetite - which appealed to Matilda (née Knolvoer) Bauls, and which convinced her that it was a fitting symbol for the new school. So the school badge was designed with a black rhino, head-

on, on a red background trimmed with orange. Matilda gave out publicly that the colours had no symbolic value, but privately - only to her closest friends, mind you - would she confess that the red was the blood of Christ, and that the orange, her favourite colour and her favourite fruit, was her homage to the place of her birth: Bethlehem in the Orange Free State of South Africa. Unfortunately, the manufacturers of the badge didn't do a very good job of the rhino and it turned out to look, according to the handful of iconoclasts in the school - spurred on, no doubt, by that nasty little man, Boland Lipp - less like one of the Big Five - than an enormous, erect black penis.

One of these iconoclasts, secretly loved by Elizabeth, was a boy in Upper Sixth called Jet Bunion, who watched Monty Python videos and read Kurt Vonnegut. He admired Vonnegut for his remark that, any day now, somebody was going to take a photograph of God and sell it to *Popular Mechanics*. Jet was good-looking and clever and all that, but his main attraction for Elizabeth and the other Born-Again Christians, who made up the bulk of the school, was his sinfulness. Sinfulness in itself is no big deal, but when it comes with baby-blue eyes and a tight little bum; when it comes with a guitar and a tortoise-shell plectrum; when it comes with a Yamaha 750 and a torn leather jacket - then it is a big deal, one of the Big Six, as Jet's fellow rugby players called him - a dangerous animal. Fair game.

Elizabeth Fawkes, turning sixteen, was thinking of Jet and only half-concentrating on her father's story about the Asil Khan. They were fishing from the wall, a shady spot on the far side of the camping area. Mrs Fawkes would be joining them shortly, with a thermos flask of tea and some home-made banana loaf. Mtshelele Dam was Elizabeth's favourite spot in the Matopos National Park, especially now, during the rainy season when the dam was reasonably full of water and the lilies were in full flower. The white variety prevailed here. Elizabeth called them lotus plants but her mother liked to be more specific. She called them *Ottelia exserta*. Mrs Fawkes was surprised that none of the more common blue variety, *Nymphaea caerulea*, grew on this dam. The lilies reminded Elizabeth of a poem they had studied with their English teacher, Mr Lipp. How did it go?

In the afternoon they came unto a land
in which it seemed always afternoon.

That's what it's like here, she thought. Time seems to stand still. 'There is no joy but calm.' A calm disturbed by the occasional gusts of wind that rippled

across the dam and caused the lily pads to flip limp-wristedly in the direction of Bulawayo: a kind of synchronised farewell to the hustle and bustle of school life. Jet Bunion. She had tried so hard to convert him to the Lord, that is until his proposal had shocked and thrilled her into silence.

Phillip ‘Guy’ Fawkes was fishing for bream, but today only the tiddlers seemed to be biting, taking his bait: the earthworms he’d bought from a vendor outside the Bulawayo City Hall. Time and again he’d reel in to find a shiny hook stripped clean. Elizabeth couldn’t bear to look when he threaded another wriggling, juice-squirting worm over the vicious barb. She did not fish but she loved to be with her father when he seemed to be at peace with the world, that is when he squatted on the banks of some dam or weir or river, somewhere in the bush of Matabeleland, and threw in a line. Phillip was senior motor mechanic at Twot Motors, Bulawayo. Volkswagens were his speciality. He kept his boss’s Porsche humming like a top. Next to fishing and VWs, his interest was in poultry; he was a keen member of the Bulawayo Poultry Society. The evening before coming out to Mtshелеle he had won third prize in the society’s annual fund-raising raffle: the fertile egg of an Asil Khan, the rarest and strongest, according to CA Finsterbusch, of all Asil strains. Originally there had been six eggs, apparently smuggled out of India in somebody’s diplomatic bag, but five of them had become cracked in transit and had ended up scrambled, on lightly buttered toast. The single sound egg was now in Mr Fawkes’s proud possession.

“Do you think you could hatch it, Lizzie?”

“Sorry, Dad?”

“My egg. Do you think you could hatch it?”

“Not in my bra, Dad.” Elizabeth was serious. “It’s too much of an effort, especially with school coming up soon. I’ll put it under Mrs Noodle when we get home. She started sitting yesterday.”

“Not this egg, Lizzie, it’s too precious. Mrs Noodle may reject it. This is an Asil Khan, Lizzie; it’s got to hatch. Your bra is the safest bet. Damn these tiddlers; they’ve taken my bait again.” He took careful hold of the gleaming hook, shook his worm tin, unearthed a juicy specimen, held it at one extremity - he could not distinguish head from tail - between thumb and forefinger and forced it onto the hook. It spilled a yellow juice. “Will you do it, please?”

Elizabeth closed the book she had been dipping into and placed it carefully on the ground. It was one of her recommended novels - Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. “Twenty one days is a long time, Dad. And

what about nights when I'm asleep? I could easily crush it."

"You won't, my love. You didn't the last time with Mrs Noodle. It was a perfect delivery. I hope it turns out to be a cock. I wonder what colour it is? I think the Asil Khans are supposed to be a very dark red with pale coloured legs." He cast his line way out into the middle of the dam. Both father and daughter turned their heads at the approach of Mrs Philippa 'Gay' Fawkes. She was walking along the earth wall of the dam carrying a basket in one hand and her book of trees in the other. She was wearing a pink tracksuit, pink socks, probably pink underwear, and pink tackies. On her head was a large pink floppy hat protecting her pink skin from the sun.

"I'm not that keen on cocks," said Elizabeth. Mrs Fawkes heard this and wondered, with alarm, what father and daughter had been talking about. She quickened her steps. She was uneasy on the subject of human sex and, hitherto, had avoided it in the company of her daughter. When she came up to them and set the basket down between them, she was breathing quite hard.

"So," she said, looking for a place to sit, "what have you two been discussing besides the weather?"

"Dad wants me to hatch his egg in my bra," said Elizabeth. "Don't sit there, Mum, it's full of ants; come here next to me." She made room for her mother on the small patch that was fairly level. She reached for the basket. "Shall I pour the tea?"

Phillip Fawkes was concentrating on his float. It jerked in a manner that indicated something larger than a tiddler was biting. Slowly he reeled in a bit of line. He stood up and bent forward. His face was tense. The float suddenly disappeared - and he struck. The action disturbed a pair of damsel flies (his wife identified them as *Lestes pinheyi*), which had been mating on the tip of his rod, but it did not hook a fish. "Darn it," muttered Phillip, "that was no tiddler. I was too quick to strike." He reeled in.

"Never mind, Dad," said his daughter. "Come and have a cup of tea and a slice of banana loaf." Mrs Fawkes handed her husband a damp cloth with which he rubbed off the sticky worm deposits on his fingers. Then the little family group settled down to a most enjoyable tea. Elizabeth resembled both her parents. She had her father's sallow but finely grained skin, not the hint of a blackhead or a pimple; she had her father's soft, almost black hair, and candid brown eyes; she had her father's slender build. The rest was her mother's: broad nose, uneven ears, strongish chin, and perfect lips. She had her mother's brains too, though she was a lot less literal-minded than Philippa Fawkes. She was what Mr Lipp called a metaphorical thinker.

Elizabeth's religion was entirely her own, however. Both her parents were so-called 'free thinkers'. This gave Mr Fawkes the freedom to confine his thoughts to Volkswagens, fishing, and poultry; and Mrs Fawkes the freedom to confine her thoughts to natural history. Neither parent was in the least bit concerned about their daughter's obsession with Jesus: her 'Jesus loves me' pencils, her 'Jesus is Lord' T-shirts, her 'I love Jesus' bicycle. That was her choice. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was deeply concerned about her parents' indifference. It was during her first year at Black Rhino High that Elizabeth, under the influence of her science teacher, Mr Forskine - the girls called him 'Mr Wonderful' - had committed herself to Jesus and, to a lesser extent, God and the Holy Ghost. Most of the pupils at Black Rhino High were children of white 'Rhodesians' who, after losing the war of liberation, after witnessing their beloved Rhodesia become dreaded Zimbabwe, had turned for solace to the church - not those commie bastards like the Catholics or the Methodists who had supported the fuckin' terts, and the poor, and the humble, and all that shit - but the right-wing, violently anti-communist, violently pro-capitalist, American churches like the Brotherhood of Christ, and Holy Roller Rhapsody, and the Blood of Jesus, which preached the doctrine of material prosperity, and reminded their frothing congregations that it was Jesus himself who said "The poor will always be with us." The preachers at these churches weren't over-educated nerds, f'ck'n homos, kaffir boeties... they were men; they held their heads high. Look at Brother MacBraggert, for instance, of the Blood of Jesus Temple: he cut a dashing figure in his powder-blue safari suit and his sweetly tapered espadrilles.

"Where is it right now?" asked Philippa Fawkes with a mouth full of banana loaf.

"What, the egg?" replied her husband; "It's in the cubby-hole of the car, wrapped in cotton wool."

"I wonder how fresh it is, coming all the way from India. You should have started incubating it right away, you know."

His wife's admonition brought a look of panic to Phillip Fawkes's face. He turned to his daughter who had returned to her novel. "Lizzie, please?"

Elizabeth was at the place where Pip returns to the forge in order to marry Biddy and discovers that she has married Joe. "Please what, Dad?" she said, slightly annoyed at the interruption.

"Please incubate my precious egg. I'll never ask you to do it again. I promise."

"All right, I'll do it," said Elizabeth crossly. "But this is the last time,

Dad. I don't think you have any idea what a nuisance it is to have a raw egg in your bra for twenty one days. It means I have to sleep in a bra and I don't find that at all comfortable."

"That's my girl. Thanks, honey." Mr Fawkes drained his cup of tea and stood up. "Let's pack it in here and get back to our camp. We'd better get started right away." The pink natural historian said she'd scout around a bit longer in the vicinity of the dam wall. She was looking for seeds of the *Cassia abbreviata* to take home to germinate. A medicine used for the treatment of blackwater fever is derived from this pretty tree with its loose clusters of yellow flowers and its exceptionally long pods. They flower from September to November. The seeds can be collected from December to June. Today was January 1, 1992: New Year's Day. So Mrs Fawkes stayed behind with her tree book, Keith Coates Palgrave's *Trees of Southern Africa*, and a small plastic container for seeds.

Back at the camp father and daughter wasted no time preparing the Asil Khan egg for incubation. Father fetched it from the cubby-hole of their VW Combi, and daughter carefully stuffed it into the left cup of her bra. They calculated that the egg would hatch on January 21, seven days into the new school year. Now Elizabeth had one extra thing to worry about. The 'O' level results that would be coming out in February or March were a big worry. Her parents' indifference to Christianity was a big worry. But her biggest worry of all was Jet Bunion, the boy she loved, secretly and distractedly. And his proposal. Challenge, rather. She shivered at the thought of it.

The night before, New Year's Eve, the Fawkes had had the campsite entirely to themselves. It had been a perfect night, still, sweet smelling after the Christmas rains. The myriad stars were in sharp focus, dazzling - not to the eyes, but the mind. When the last bird of the day, a purple-crested lourie, had ceased its creaking and its wailing, the only sound that could be heard, until Elizabeth fell asleep, was the occasional plop in the water of a fish diving. The frogs, the mosquitoes, the crickets, for some reason, had been silent. The moon had been gliding from its last quarter to its new phase. Elizabeth had watched it with ineffable, untraceable desire.

The Fawkes family shared a four-man canvas tent when they went on their frequent camping trips. They found it quite roomy enough for sleeping purposes. Mrs Fawkes slept on a stretcher - a relic from Phillip's army days - in the middle of the tent, while her husband and daughter slept on thin foam rubber mattresses on either side of her. Mr Fawkes was not much of a reader,

but his womenfolk devoured, by candlelight, book after book. The mother read natural history, the daughter, everything she could get her hands on, but particularly poetry and books on Christianity. Indeed she dedicated at least one hour every night of her life to an inspired reading of the Bible. Her method was to open her Bible at random – Mr Lipp called it stichomancy - and plunge in, boots and all!

While her father built up the fire to cook their evening meal, Elizabeth put down her Dickens and picked up her Bible. On camping trips she took her pocket-sized King James version, a version not recommended by Dale Forskine or by her minister, Moral MacBraggart, but highly recommended by Boland Lipp, a lapsed Anglican with a taste for the Renaissance of which the King James Bible was a product. He called it a great literary achievement, equal to Shakespeare, and praised its ‘exalted simplicity’. Mr Forskine, on the other hand, warned his converts against seeing the Bible as a work of literature. The arts were dangerous, he claimed - after Communism, Christianity’s greatest threat.

Her Bible fell open on pages 650 and 651 - not surprisingly since it frequently lay open on these pages - for two reasons. Firstly it was half-way through her Bible so there was an equal weight distribution which loosened the spine down its middle; secondly ‘The Song of Solomon’ was Elizabeth’s favourite Old Testament book. She kept this a secret from everyone. Her good angel told her that the book was a metaphor of the love of Jesus and his church, of the church glorying in Christ; her bad angel told her that it was a celebration of sexual love between a man and a woman. Neither angel prevailed; instead a kind of dialectical process was set up between the two, not in the Hegelian sense, which makes spirit primary and world secondary, or in the reversed Marxist sense. These are dialectical laws that assume a progressive unification towards a final truth, which for Hegel is spiritual and for the Marxists is material. Elizabeth’s dialectic was an interaction of contradictory forces, a dialectic which precluded resolution beyond what Boland Lipp might have called ‘felt moments’, which may be repeated but are never sustained.

So there was a little more than chance working when the Bible fell open on these words: ‘... Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew.’ And these words: ‘My beloved put in his hands by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him.’ And these words: ‘I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself...’ And these words: ‘... the joints of thy thighs are like jewels... thy

navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins.' Reading fragments out of context like this was the influence of Elizabeth's bad angel. Simultaneously her good angel reminded her that this was an extended metaphor of the love of the church to Christ, and that thighs and navels (meaning pudenda) and bellies and things were simply the graces of the church. That beautiful evening on the Mtshelele Dam, a little breezier than yesterday, a little cloudier - her father had got a good fire going, and there came her mother loaded down with cassia pods, pinker than ever in the quarter light of the dying day - that evening Elizabeth Fawkes was feeling the moment very intensely indeed.

Her father broke the spell when he called out, "Who's for a drink?"

Her mother was within earshot when she heard her daughter's reply: "I'd love a long one, Dad." Then she called to her mother: "Hi, Mum, did you get your seeds?"

"What do you mean by a 'long one', Elizabeth?" said Mrs Fawkes remembering with guilt her own adolescent fantasies, which featured, among others, Errol Flynn, Rasputin, and King Lobengula.

"A drink, Mum. Is there still some Mazoe orange left?"

"Plenty," said her father. "A long one coming up if I can find the glasses."

"They're in the cooler box, Phillip, with the juice. I'll have one too, thanks. There might even be some ice left. Yes, I got my seeds. Dozens of them. I hope they'll germinate. Look at the length of these pods! Aren't they beautiful?"

"Yes they are," agreed Elizabeth, taking one from her mother's bundle and feeling it with the tips of her fingers. The velvety brown pod had split open but most of the seeds were still intact. She shook a couple out and held them in the palm of her left hand. "Pretty seeds too."

"Yes they are. Don't lose them, Elizabeth."

Phillip Fawkes came over with the drinks for his wife and daughter. Ice clicked as they drank. Phillip poured himself a beer. "Cheers," he said.

"Cheers," said Elizabeth.

"Here's to 1992," said Philippa.

"May it bring joy to our hearts."

"And peace to our minds."

"And water to Bulawayo."

Phillip nodded his head vigorously. "Yes, without water there will be

neither joy nor peace.” The family group began a desultory conversation about Bulawayo’s water crisis, all more or less agreeing that the only solution was a pipeline from the Zambezi. Phillip got up periodically to check the fire, Elizabeth climbed the wild fig tree (*Ficus ingens*) under which they had pitched their tent and, after another glass of Mazoe orange, Philippa picked up her wet-pack and a towel, and ambled off to the ablution block for a shower.

Later they enjoyed a supper of braaied pork sausages and sadza with relish, which Phillip had made from onions, garlic, green peppers, and tomatoes. They had the whole world to themselves.

Chapter Two

Boland Lipp was celebrating his fiftieth birthday by leaving his pupils' exercise books in the back of his 1967 VW Beetle, by unplugging the telephone and by listening to excerpts from Bach's *Matthäus Passion*. He was sipping, savouring, neat scotch - Dimple Haig - from the modified skull of a large rodent: probably a porcupine. Jesus was singing: "Ihr habet allezeit Arme bei euch, mich aber habt ihr nicht allezeit" in a rich, sweet baritone that reminded Boland, somehow, of praline. He looked up the word in a dictionary - forever at his elbow - and was amused to find that it came from a French soldier called Marshall de Plessis-Preslin whose cook invented the sweet by browning nuts in boiling sugar. I'll try that if I can get hold of some decent nuts, thought Boland as he put down the dictionary and picked up his drinking vessel. He took a small sip of the excellent liquor and rolled it on his tongue. With a sigh he settled back on the old divan which took up most of his living room and which smelt faintly of urine. It was upholstered in a coarse cabbage-green material, and it was stuffed with kapok and slightly demented springs. Green was Boland Lipp's favourite colour. His eyes were green. The glass in the French doors, which screened the living room from the rest of the apartment, was stained green; the walls were a pastel green; the predominantly green scatter-cushions, which were literally scattered all over the floor, the pot plants, the serpentine fireplace - Boland had collected the stones himself - the rising damp in one corner, the malachite ornaments... all combined to create the effect, in the living room of this unmarried, middle-aged English teacher, of a monstrous green salad.

More like apples - Granny Smiths - still on the tree. Yes, a northern fruit, cold and tangy, covered in dew. Nothing sugary about Bach. "Was wollt ihr mir geben? Ich will ihn euch verraten." That's Judas, the bugger....

Three loud knocks on the floor of the apartment above him, probably with a sherry bottle (the time before he'd heard one smash on the third impact) warned Boland to reduce the volume of his music or, in the words of Mrs Afrodite (her parents had been poor spellers) Fawkes, to "Stop the blerry racket, men". Boland leaned over to his record player and turned the volume down. He didn't want to have a fight, on his birthday, with the likes of Mrs Fawkes: terror of Cornwall Crescent.

There were six one-bedroom apartments in Cornwall Crescent, which was owned by an anonymous businessman of Asian descent. Boland Lipp occupied Number One, Mrs Fawkes occupied Number Six. As it was a

double-storey construction, Number Six squatted on top of Number One, Number Five squatted on top of Number Two, and Number Four squatted on top of Number Three. Number Two, next door to Boland's, was owned by a Gwanda farmer called Craig Wick who used it for the occasional weekend when he came in to watch his son, Doberman, playing rugby for Black Rhino High (the school where Boland taught English). Sometimes his wife, Beryl, accompanied him, sometimes she didn't. They had a daughter, Candle, who had a key to the apartment where she frequently put into practice the relevant ministry's call for Education with Production. She accomplished this with the assistance of several of her friends in Form Three C at Black Rhino High and a most fortunate apprentice Fitter and Turner from the Technical Training College called Hoagy Van Worsmasjien. These sessions, which generally took place during the week - God knows how the boarders got away with it - were awaited with, as Wordsworth might have put it, a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings, in the green-eyed fifty-year old. A thin brick wall separated Number One's living room from Number Two's bedroom. They shared a common wall-socket. If Boland Lipp unplugged his socket, and put his sound left ear against the three little holes, he could hear quite clearly the stimulating sounds of Education with Production going on in the Wick's apartment. Boland's good angel told him that he ought to report these girls to Mr McMackmack, the headmaster of Black Rhino High, but his bad angel wouldn't hear of it, and his bad angel nearly always prevailed.

Apartment Number Three was illegally occupied by at least two families. The Amazambanes lived in the bedroom, and the Ilithangas squatted in the lounge or living room. The combined number of children was fourteen but not all of them lived permanently in the apartment. Neither did their various relations live permanently in the apartment. Mrs Fawkes frequently reported these people to the anonymous Asian landlord but when his agent, also Asian, approached Mr Azambane about sub-letting the apartment, he was threatened with the words: "Remember Uganda!" So the tenants of Number Three were left alone. Besides, they paid their rent promptly, which was more than could be said of Mrs Fawkes who was always at least three months in arrears.

The apartment above Number Three, Number Four, was occupied by an elderly 'coloured' family who had remained staunch royalists right through UDI and Independence. A huge framed picture of Queen Elizabeth the Second, as a young woman, hung over their mantelpiece. It was very faded.

In honour of the Queen they kept a pet corgi appropriately named Prince Phillip. Although he had been castrated, Prince Phillip was highly sexed and he would mount anything within his reach. His particular favourites were visitors' ankles, handbags left on the floor, and grandchildren who had not yet begun to walk. "Stop that, Prince Phillip," old Mrs Reebok would say; "Cut it out, Prince Phillip," old Mr Reebok would say; but Prince Phillip didn't stop it or cut it out. He banged away at anything that remotely resembled a corgi bitch, or any bitch, for that matter; and if he could have reached Afrodite Fawkes's knee - or even higher, God forbid - he would have banged that. The present Prince Phillip was one in a long line of Prince Phillips - the fifth since the Reeboks had lived in Cornwall Crescent - the eleventh if you counted the house in Barham Green. So the dog's full title was Prince Phillip the Eleventh.

The Reeboks had two sons and a daughter. Andrew, the oldest, was serving a six year sentence, hard labour, in the 'Grey Street' prison for knifing a policeman; Edward, the middle child - the 'ham in the sandwich' - as his mother affectionately described him, was serving a fifteen year sentence in the Khami prison for armed robbery; and Anne, the 'baby', was an alcoholic. Anne was a trained beautician, a very good one too, according to former clients, but because of her drinking problem, she could not hold on to a job for long. She and her two children (her husband, Dolfie, had been hanged for first degree murder) spent a lot of time with Oupa and Ouma Reebok at Cornwall Crescent. Anne's children were both girls, twins: Jade and Sapphire. They were being raised to distrust, and if possible shun, all males other than Oupa Reebok and boys under the age of six. Anne's fear and hatred of men - sexually active men in particular - was not without justification. When, on rare occasions, the old folk summoned up the courage to review the recent history of their immediate family; to ask themselves what went wrong; to ask God why; to gaze at the picture of their Queen and sigh; the old man, finally, would mutter "Colonialism", the old lady - she always let her husband speak first - would underscore that with "Imperialism" (this notwithstanding the framed photograph of Winston Churchill giving his famous victory sign, hanging on the wall opposite the Queen); and then, in unison, "Racialism". The conjuring of these three words, not without justification, seemed to have a sedative effect on the old couple, and by doing it once or twice a week they would manage, as the late Harry Lauder advised, to "keep right on to the end of the road".

Sandwiched between the Reeboks and the widow Fawkes, in Number

Five, lived two English expatriate schoolteachers, Simon and Nicholas, who were united by a common hatred: white Zimbabweans, or Rhodes, as they were sardonically called, and by a common love: 'black pussy'. They taught at the same secondary school in one of the high density areas; it was called Prince Charming High School, and it was co-educational. Simon was supposed to teach English, and Nicholas was supposed to teach History, but they both saw this compartmentalizing of subjects as a load of bourgeois crap, as part of an overall strategy to keep a corrupt establishment of Anglican sodomites in power. So they taught politics. They were both paid up members of an ultra left-wing breakaway group called the Gallopskyites. They had broken away from the Trotskyites who, they claimed, were not moving quickly enough in the direction of world revolution. Both young men were popular with the majority of the pupils who were stimulated, if not shocked, by their virulent anti-establishmentarianism - that's how Simon put it. But the teaching staff, a handful of trainee students excepted, were not so impressed. They were nearly all black Zimbabweans who had been trained under the old regime and whose views on education were more conservative than those of the white Zimbabweans. It was a baby-dumping incident on the school premises that had created a permanent rift between the two Englishmen and their Zimbabwean colleagues. One of the school groundsmen had discovered, in a dustbin outside the girls' toilets, a dead baby, newborn, wrapped in newspaper. The headmaster immediately called in the police who arrived promptly - since there was not likely to be any violence against themselves - and ordered every single girl in the school to stand in a long line stretching all the way from Room Five to the netball field. They then systematically felt every girl's breasts in order to determine which, if any, were in milk. The fourteenth girl in the queue was discovered to be conspicuously pregnant so then the police began to feel tummies (and even further down with the prettier girls) as well as breasts. As a result of this exercise, no fewer than seven girls, one in the first form, three in the second form, two in the third form, and one in the sixth form were instantly expelled from the school. All these girls, the police investigations showed, were either pregnant or had recently given birth. All of them denied having dumped a baby in the dustbin, all of them, therefore, were found by the officer in charge to be guilty of the deed and were thrown out of the school. One of these girls was fourteen year old Godknows Ilithanga who squatted with her family in Number Three, Cornwall Crescent, 38a Lend Street, Bulawayo. This police action, endorsed by the headmaster and the majority

of his staff, amazed and incensed the expatriate Englishmen who tended to stereotype black Africans as purely good, and white Africans as purely evil. They called for a mass protest by the pupil body but only a few gathered: the children were terrified of the headmaster who slashed backsides with his scythe-like cane as if they were tufts of grass - especially on those mornings when he was drunk. Furthermore, some of the pupils had seen the poor dumped baby and news had spread very quickly through the school that its skin was very light - almost pink. The expats, with their proclivity towards 'black pussy', by no means a secret at Prince Charming High, became prime suspects.

Cornwall Crescent was one of the more well-kept apartment blocks in Lend Street. Situated on the Second Avenue corner, on half an acre of garden - mostly mango and lime trees that the anonymous Asian landlord had planted - it looked out over an undeveloped piece of land that could, perhaps, be called a green belt. It was something between a park and a vacant lot.

Certainly it boasted public toilets, and certainly there were a few trees dotted about; and there was the Matsheumhlope excuse for a river down to which it sloped; but there were no litter bins, and litter lay everywhere, most of it empty opaque beer cartons, although more recently, with the AIDS Awareness Campaign gathering momentum, these were being seriously rivalled by used condoms. There was also a lot of broken glass lying about, and the shells of three or four motor cars that had been stolen for their radios and then set alight. Children played in these shells during the day, and adults mated in them during the night. Ask Afrodite Fawkes. She scans the area every night, all through the night, with a powerful pair of binoculars. There is enough light from the adjacent residences and the streets to afford her a dim view - the dimmer the view the more vivid her imaginative interpretation - of pounding rumps. She strongly suspects Boland Lipp of having visited, on more than one occasion, the Vauxhall Velox, which had retained more of its ducio, a now faded bottle-green, than the other wrecks. Certainly he spent a lot of time, particularly in the evenings, walking about the area. She would dearly love to catch him in the act. You couldn't tell her, "Me, Afrodite Jewl Fawkes, that our friend Mr Lipp isn't a bleddy homo, men!" He did walk with a rather mincing step; and he was rather limp-wristed. And then there was that boy, Jet something-or-other, who seemed to spend a lot of time at Number One Cornwall Crescent. But then so did Godknows Ilithanga; so did most of the children who lived in the block.

Boland Lipp was a kind-hearted man. He was a lonely man. He had no family of his own.

He roused himself to turn the record over. “Blute nur, du liebes Herz!” He topped up his drink. He raised the skull to a smiling portrait, in a green and gold frame, of his hero: the late Paul Robeson. When Robeson had died on January 23, 1976, Boland had gone into deep mourning and for three weeks had taken himself to bed, turning his face to the wall. “Cheers, Big Paul,” he said, and then, “Happy birthday to me.” He took a sip, turned up the volume, and returned to his divan. Bach’s glorious music took him quickly out of time and space; and the exploding sherry bottle on the floor above, as quickly, took him back again.

Chapter Three

Rudolph McMackmack had eyes like catherine wheels. His wife, Doef, was a frequent folder, in public places, of thighs so fat and dimpled that if you were sitting opposite her at a cocktail party, say, and she used the hem of her dress - a mustard coloured crimplene, very likely - to clean her spectacles - not by bending down to the hem, you understand, but by pulling it up to the bridge of her nose - if you were sitting opposite her, you'd be the privileged witness of a baker's dozen of fannies: twelve cul de sacs, and one - easy does it, Mac - one, in the words of the poet, cavern, measureless to man. Look, no one is saying that Mrs McMackmack didn't wear knickers, but the knickers she did wear were so frayed as to the elastic and so worn as to the gusset that she might just as well not have been wearing them.

Rudolph McMackmack was headmaster of Black Rhino High. He believed that children ought to be disciplined in order to learn self-discipline - a very reasonable point of view. He smacked the boys, tickled the girls, and sent his staff - children after all - threatening memoranda. He dressed invariably in safari suits, with shorts for informal occasions like inter-school swimming galas, and longs for formal occasions like Rotary luncheons. These safari suits were conservative of cut and, with the exception of the powder-blue which smouldered reflectively in Mac's centrifugal eyes, of colour.

He had decided on the powder-blue for this occasion, a New Year's Day luncheon party held at the palatial Burnside residence of businessman and member of the school board, Strontium Twot. His wife lived there too, of course. Her name was Gaylene and she ran a health studio in town called *Bodylines*. Her face was sixty years old and her body - in a designer track suit - was twenty years old, so she averaged out to around forty. Let's say thirty nine. Gaylene owned designer track suits in every pastel shade you can imagine. Today she wore the lavender trimmed with mentholypus green. She looked stunning, she thought. So did Rudolph McMackmack.

Anybody who was anybody in Bulawayo had been invited to this party. The Twots' guest list read like a Who's Who of the city's - nay the province's; for had not the Wicks from Gwanda been invited? And the Galls from Triangle? And the Smeckmas from Zvishavane? - a Who's Who of the city's businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants. At least one of the guests, a token black, Strontium's response to the President's call for reconciliation, was not only a businessman but a

commercial farmer, a successful criminal, and a civil servant as well. Among this gathered elite were the invariable sprinkling of clowns like lawyers, doctors, and headmasters. But the adornment of the party was Brother Moral MacBraggert of the Blood of Jesus Temple where most of these people worshipped, threw fits, spoke in tongues, and publicly confessed their sins. Brother MacBraggert's Gospel of Prosperity was of great comfort to them. Not to the headmaster of Black Rhino High, however, since he was a staunch Anglican, and since he did not possess a Mercedes Benz, a Toyota HiLux Four-Wheel Drive with double-cab, a couple of runabouts like Golfs and Renaults for the wife and children, a houseboat on Kariba, and a small aircraft - a toy, really - just a six-seater - for the occasional jaunt to the Kruger National Park or the south coast. He possessed a 1964 Opel stationwagon in excellent running order. Another reason why this preacher was not of great comfort to Rudolph McMackmack, not today, anyway, was that he too would come dressed in a powder-blue safari suit of exactly the same design as the headmaster's - and his tummy had not yet begun to bulge.

The McMackmacks, as usual, were the first to arrive. Daylene had said twelve for twelve-thirty, which meant that she expected you round about one. Rudolph and Doef arrived fifteen minutes before twelve, a most inappropriate time for the Twot household, since Strontium, only half dressed, was only halfway through one of his mighty public holiday shits, a four-pounder which left him drained, slightly clammy to the touch, and mildly euphoric. The smell, much to the embarrassment of his family - for they always seemed to have guests on public holidays - would pervade the entire house for up to an hour after delivery. By one o' clock it would have cleared. But now? Damn the McMackmacks. And what was Daylene doing when the doorbell rang? Screaming at the top of her voice: at Nebuchadnezzar the cook for letting the garlic bread dry out, at Lucky the laundry-woman for ironing a hole in the madam's angora rabbit underpants, at Lexington the assistant gardener for allowing the swimming pool to turn green, at Hopeful the children's maid for failing to pick up the three thousand Lego pieces that Boss Aubrey, at eleven the youngest Twot, had strewn all over the living room carpet. These damn servants. More trouble than they're worth. I don't know how I put up with them. No wonder they can't run the country.

The McMackmacks were a bore. The only reason they were invited to the party was that the Twots' son, New York, and their daughter, Skye-lee, attended Black Rhino High. Both were rather difficult children and it was in

the interest of all the Twots to keep in the headmaster's good books. New York would be repeating upper sixth this year. Although the 'A' level results had not yet come out, he was convinced (his teachers were even more convinced) that he had failed all three of his subjects: English, Afrikaans, and Geography. Besides, he wanted to have another season with the First rugby team, another chance to get his colours blazer. More than anything in the world, New York Twot wanted to be awarded the Black Rhino High rugby colours blazer. His younger sister, Skye-lee, was in with a bad crowd at school - especially that Wick girl from Gwanda. The 'slot machine'. There was a bunch of them in Form Three C who were always in trouble. There'd even been rumours of expulsion. The Twots, millionaires, simply had, for the sake of their children, to put up with the McMackmacks, relative paupers.

Rudolph gave the doorbell another push, with a very long, very hairy, very knucky index finger. He bit his nails down to the quick; all except the nail of this useful finger which was long and rather dirty. This nail was used, among other things, for nose-picking, scratching, especially of a rectal nature, and flea-popping. He turned to his wife who was standing patiently beside him picking bits of fluff off her smart three-piece crimplene outfit. Doef swore by crimplene. "Listen to the bitch," he said with disgust.

"Shut up, Dolph," his wife replied, "someone may hear you."

"My dear, I don't give a damn. Good God!" His sensitive nose had picked up the vanguard of Strontium Twot's fallout just now beginning to seep through the keyhole of the front door.

"What's the matter now?" said his wife still picking away at her faded purple suit.

"You haven't just dropped your guts, have you, my dear? There's a sudden stench in my nostrils, a stench that would stun a smaller man, a man who had not seen service in the trenches, as I have."

Before Doef McMackmack could answer, the door opened and there stood the lady of the house trying her best not to look discomposed. Rudolph's eyes turned a shade bluer at the sight of her slim, trim body. His own wife was a dumpling by comparison. "Hullo the McMackmacks," said the Managing Directress of *Bodylines*, internationally qualified to Level Four of Bodco, in a voice that matched her tight smile, very conscious of her husband's onion and meatball fallout, and of the fact that her early guests must have heard her shouting at the servants.

Doef said, "Hullo, Laydene, I hope we not too early." Rudolph merely

leered, baring a set of large, strong, yellow teeth.

"It's Daylene. Not at all. Come in. Come in. Please make yourselves comfortable. 'Scuse the mess, we not quite ready. But Strontium'll be down in a mo. Bit of a tummy bug, you..."

"Oh no not another one," exclaimed Doef trying to look distressed. "I've heard of so many people who've gone down with it."

"Really... er... Doef?"

"Yes! Dolphie had it on Sunday. Had to leave the church in the middle of communion. And there was no paper in the church loo! Did I tear a strip off Father John! Then I came down with it on Monday. I was up all night. Ask Dolphie. Vomiting and diarrhoea, vomiting and diarrhoea. I tell you, I nearly died. Didn't I, Dolphie?"

"If you say so, my dear, if you say so," replied her husband giving Mrs Twot a wink that was only half conspiratorial. The other half, and what can you expect from an eye like a catherine wheel? was pure lechery.

The three people were standing rather awkwardly in the entrance hall. Upstairs a toilet flushed. Doef McMackmack frowned slightly. "Did I hear a toilet flushing?" she said. She went on before her hostess could reply, and as this was a moral issue, her nostrils began to flare slightly. "I must say I'm surprised, Elaine, that you permit the flushing of toilets at a time when Bulawayo is about to run out of water. Do you know that I empty our WC - I do it once a day, usually just before we go to bed, don't I, Dolphie? - with an old soup ladle? Not a pleasant job but it does save water."

"It's Daylene. We don't have to worry about water," she replied with a mixture of irritation and superiority in her voice. "If we exceed our ration, and we do every month, we simply pay the fine. We can afford it. Besides which we have two excellent boreholes in the garden. We got loads of water."

Doef, nostrils flaring, wanted to remonstrate but her husband restrained her by giving her elbow a squeeze. The squeeze was accompanied by a rather painful dig with the practical fingernail. This was not the time or the place for an argument. They were guests, very early guests, it seemed. Decorum. Decorum. Decorum, my dear.

"We also got loads of booze," said Daylene of *Bodylines*. "Come into the garden where it's all set up and I'll go and see what Strontium is doing." She led them through the spacious house past a set of nude charcoal drawings of - good Lord! - Mrs Twot herself. The headmaster's wife gaped, her husband ogled. There were four drawings in identical brass frames,

imitations of four of the most famous nudes in the genre. In the first she is Titian's *Venus of Urbino* - a much skinnier Venus; and where Titian's nude is simply resting (modestly covering?) her left hand on her mons veneris, Wick's - yes, the drawings had been executed by the multi-talented Craig Wick - Wick's nude is clearly masturbating. At least that's how Rudolph McMackmack saw it. In the second she is Courbet's *Girl in White Stockings*, again a lot skinnier, and with her legs a lot wider apart. Her pouting womanhood, Rudolph's phrase, caused his eyes to spin. In the third frame Wick copies Rembrandt's *Danae*, but once again, his model is a lot skinnier than Rembrandt's, and a hell of a lot prettier; and where the original's right hand is open and empty, about to receive something - a glass of wine, perhaps? - Wick's copy seems to be already holding what looked to the headmaster like a salami or an English cucumber. In the final drawing Botticelli's *Venus* is presented with considerably less hair than the original, and instead of standing on a seashell, she is bouncing on a trampoline. "Like them?" Daylene coyly asked. Neither Doef nor Rudolph could reply: Doef because of shock, and Rudolph because of a dry throat. So Daylene went on: "Of course that was a very long time ago; before Skye-Lee was born. New York was just a toddler. I only got them framed last week, you know. For years I didn't dare show them to anyone except close friends like the... er... Wicks. You know the Wicks, don't you? Doberman's parents. What a fine rugby player that boy is. But recently I thought, I thought... ah what the hell! this isn't the Dark Ages, you know. And I mean, it is art and all that. So I put them up. Come outside into the garden and I'll fix you a drink."

They followed her into the hot, sunny day, at least one pair of eyes, the pair that tended to spin, fixed on her rather flat bottom and the tantalizing outline of her panties. The garden, two sweeping acres of emerald green, three sprays going flat out, a fountain, a fish pond, bird baths, swimming pool, paddling pool, water slide... the garden was a veritable oasis in the Bulawayo desert with something like four months of water left in the supply dams. The McMackmacks' garden - indeed the gardens of all those Bulawayo residents without boreholes, or with boreholes that had run dry, or who hadn't by-passed their meters - was dead. Every single one of their thirty fruit trees had died. First the figs went; then the avocado pears; then the plums; then the apricots; then the citrus; then the peaches; and finally the mangoes. Some of the trees had been nearly thirty years old. Doef had planted them with her bare hands, that is to say, her 'garden boy' had planted them with his bare hands, while Doef had supervised. The prickly pear was

still going strong but you could hardly call that a fruit tree. Could you? Doef didn't say it - decorum - but she felt it was a crying shame that people like the Twots, who could afford it, wasted so much precious water, at a time like this. Rudolph said something, though. He said "Bunch of bloody Neros." And he wasn't thinking only of the Twots but of nearly all the parents who had children at his school. Their school, rather, for it was run by the Board. The headmaster's position was merely titular. He liked that word, though.

"Big yours?" said Daylene who had not quite caught Rudolph's words. Her eyebrows lifted aggressively. She was about to open a bottle of Scotch, a crate of which her husband had bought from a local bottle store for \$1 200. The headmaster hadn't tasted a Scotch, his favourite drink, in fifteen years.

Rudolph had to think quickly. "Uh, it's a quotation," he said, "Kipling, I think: 'Crunch the muddy heroes', I think it goes." Stupid bitch would be none the wiser. "Or it might have been 'Punch the muddy heroes'."

"What made you think of it? What can I get you to drink? Scotch?"

"I'll have a beer, if you don't mind; a Lion Lager; and my wife will have a cane and water. Won't you my dear?"

"A cane and water will be lovely, thank you. Just a finger of water please." At that moment Strontium Twot emerged from the house - it was not yet half-past twelve - said his hullo and relieved his wife of bar duty. When he had handed his guests their drinks, he poured himself a Scotch and soda and his wife a Scotch and coke. "Cheers," he said, "welcome to 'Strontaylene'. Your first time here, isn't it?"

"I believe it is," the headmaster replied to the man who had the power to fire him. "Yes, cheers."

"Cheers," said Mrs McMackmack.

"Good luck," said Mrs Twot. "So what made you think of it?" She gave Mr McMackmack a quizzical look. Rudolph blushed. The 'it' he'd been thinking of for the past fifteen minutes had been having sex with his hostess. His battered old willy had doubled its length, veered further to the right in his accommodating Meridians, but hadn't bothered to rise more than a few degrees. It seldom did these days. More comfortable that way. "I beg your pardon?" he managed to say.

"You know, the quote, the 'muddy heroes' or something." The arc of her left eyebrow had flattened from the aggressive to the cute. Her right eyebrow remained somewhat fixed in position. Hockey accident. Years ago.

Rudolph choked on his beer for a while to give himself time to make something up. Why didn't he have the guts to tell these ignorant, rich

bastards what he really thought about them? His willy had retracted to its normal hot-weather size and had settled into a less acute angle. His war experience, as usual, came to the rescue. "Oh the... er... Kipling? Or was it Sassoon? Your herbaceous borders... all that mud, you know; reminded me of the trenches. The Last Effort, you know. African campaign. Monty. Rommel. Gave us a drubbing in Tobruk, the blasted Hun. Sorted them out in Allemain, mind you."

"I wouldn't of thought you'd get much mud in the desert," said Strontium pouring himself another Scotch.

Rudolph took a deep swallow of beer before replying. "There was mud enough in the trenches. Of course there was no rain, no water. But there was blood spilling, gallons of it; and there was weeping, and vomiting, and urinating. We stood in mud, my friend..." (he apostrophized) "... we knelt in mud, we lay down in mud, we died in mud. I remember men bigger than me - and I'm no small man - wetting their pants and crying for their mothers, vomiting over their boots in terror while Rommel bombed us to hell." Rudolph was beginning to fade down the distance of his divaricating eyes. Daylene excused herself and minced off with her Scotch and coke to supervise the kitchen. Strontium thought he heard the doorbell ring. He strode off with his Scotch and soda but not before urging the McMackmacks to help themselves to drinks - snacks were on the way - and to find somewhere to sit. Doef had to punch her husband quite hard in the chest in order to bring him out of his trance. The war always did that to him. They chose a couple of striped canvas deck chairs in the shade of a flamboyant tree that was still holding on to some of its beautiful orange blossom. Doef went to fetch them each another drink.

Her husband tired quickly these days. Well, what do you expect from a man of seventy? A man who should be enjoying his retirement listening to the BBC World Service, pottering about in the garden - did I say 'garden'? Desert, more like it - and re-reading his favourite authors. Not having to run a school full of spoilt, rich louts with the Board always breathing down your neck. And especially with his prostate and all. I mean!

Most of the trees in the garden were exotics: flamboyants, jacarandas, spathodias, coffee shade, hymenosporum. The few indigenous trees that had been allowed to remain had been smothered by bougainvillea creepers that, at this time of the year, were very showy indeed. Years ago when they'd bought the property - for a song - the Twots had cleared it of nearly two hundred indigenous trees - more than fifty species. They'd blasted tons of

rock - magnificent granite boulders, typical of the area. This rock had gone into the building of a seven foot wall round their entire property. All along the top of the wall jagged bits of glass, very pretty when they caught the morning light, jutted out. The entrance to the property was permanently guarded by a man from one of the security firms. He sat behind a seven foot, wrought-iron double gate with eighteen inch metal spikes along its top. The Twots' dogs: three rotweilers, a boerbul, and a doberman pinscher - locked away for the party - assisted him. One of their great achievements in the garden, which nearly every year won prizes from various horticultural societies, was the removal of a massive wild fig (a *Ficus salicifolia*), which must have been hundreds of years old, so as to put in their swimming pool.

"Thank you, my dear," said Rudolph accepting the glass of beer from his wife who then plonked herself down next to him, cane and water in hand, and proceeded to fold her thighs slowly and expansively, creating a spectacle which did not go unheeded by the sharp-eyed chief gardener, Absalom, who was weeding the herbaceous border. He clicked his tongue in wonder. So many women for the price of one!

"Look, Dolphie," she said with real concern, "your poor hands are bleeding again. You really must be more careful." He looked without interest at the tops of his hands where the skin was so thin and so covered in skin cancer that the slightest bump drew blood. He had to be careful these days, when he caned the boys at his school, not to split his hand open. Fondling the girls was not yet a problem if he avoided areas where there might be clips or pins or hooks-and-eyes lurking. In any case it wasn't really fondling. Bit of admonitory pressure, that's all. Who cares at my age, anyway? Doef dabbed at the blood with a tissue, a purple one to match her outfit. She did it gently. "I must say, you look very grand today in your powder-blue, my love. Brings out your eyes. You know, that's what I first fell in love with about you, Dolphie."

"What on earth do you mean by 'in love with about me'?"

"Your eyes, my darling, your eyes. Your blue, blue eyes." She sighed deeply, a contented sigh, and then sank her cane and water. Rudolph chuckled but then he grew serious. His eyes were indeed blue, but Moral MacBraggert's were bluer, less bloodshot, less tangential. God help me if that holy roller turns up today in his powder-blue. I won't get a second glance from the girls.

"Penny for your thoughts."

"Er... I was thinking of our first meeting. Do you remember? I was head

of the Colleen Bawn primary school. I'd been recently divorced from... er... whatsisname...?"

"Afrodite?"

"That's it: Afrodite. Spelt with an f, would you believe? Married that Fawkes chap. Subsequently killed him. Damn nearly killed me too."

"Doesn't she have a niece at Black Rhino High?"

"She does. By marriage. Lovely girl, Elizabeth. Terribly serious though. Gone religious, I believe. Blasted Jesus freaks. School's infested with 'em."

"Go back to our first meeting, while I go back for our third re-fill." Doef giggled, took the glasses, and stood up. Some more guests had arrived and were making their way to the bar area. Oh no, it was Sudbury Bauls, Chairman of the Board, and his pathetic wife, Matilda. Talk about mixing work with pleasure!

"The government doctor was doing his termly, or was it yearly? round and you were assisting him."

"Go on." She poured herself a treble this time. What they used to call a Rhodesian tot. She splashed in a bit of water and mixed it with her finger. She dug around in the huge zinc bath that was packed with ice and fished out a Lion for her husband.

"You were a damn fine nurse, Doef, qualified or not."

"Go on." She held her husband's glass at an angle of forty-five degrees and carefully poured in the beer. Rudolph was not one for froth. "Go on!" But he wouldn't. The other guests were near. She handed him his beer and then whispered, "All right, then I'll go on. I had to go to your office for some forms. You were there, behind the door, in a dreadful panic. Your willy was stuck fast in a chutney jar and you didn't know what to do." The headmaster's face, from his ears to his neck, had turned almost as red as his nose, which was permanently red and which had earned him the predictable nick-name at school of Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer. "I had the presence of mind to break the vacuum. Remember? I dragged you by the bottle from behind the door and smashed it against the side of the desk. You've still got those scars, haven't you? And then the dirty great thing thwopped out. Just like that. Thwop! You still haven't told me what you thought you were doing poking it into a chutney jar." There was no time to say more. The guests were within earshot. It was time, now, for phatic salutations.

Chapter Four

The Fawkes' garden in Hillside was one of the few gardens without working boreholes that did not look like a desert. That was because Philippa, her friends called her Gay, planted only indigenous things - not just trees, but bushes, shrubs, flowers - even grasses. Their brick under tin house, on an acre stand, had been built round about the turn of the century. They were very proud of their Oregon pine floors, doors and windows; and their pressed steel ceilings. They were very proud of their huge iron bathtub, even though it was in desperate need of re-enamelling. It was a smallish house: two bedrooms and an enclosed verandah. Phillip, his friends called him Guy, and Philippa slept in the smaller bedroom; Elizabeth, their daughter and only child, slept in the enclosed verandah; the larger bedroom doubled as a guest room and a work room for Philippa. Phillip's work room was the garage, which was large enough to park two cars; and since the Fawkes had only one car, a VW Combi at that, there was plenty of room for a work bench. There was enough room in the enclosed verandah for a desk and a bookshelf, and that was where Elizabeth worked. They were an industrious family.

Neighbours complained about the condition of the Fawkes' garden. Their four immediate neighbours were the Macimbis, who were Ndebele, the Mashitas, who were Shona, the Verwoerds, who were Afrikaans, and the Pigges, who were English. The white neighbours thought that the Fawkes' 'bushveld' lowered the tone of the neighbourhood. Presumably the Pigges' seven foot instarect wall, and the Verwoerds' six foot breeze-block wall with inset wagon wheels, raised the tone. The black neighbours who couldn't bear to see a single blade of grass, let alone wild flowers - or even trees, for that matter - anywhere near their houses, accused the Fawkes of infesting the neighbourhood with ticks and snakes and scorpions and centipedes. What they didn't plough for mealies and vegetables, they cleared of every growing thing, and swept with grass brooms, morning, noon and night, producing great clouds of choking dust, and making a significant contribution to the thinning of the earth's crust. Any trees that ever existed in their gardens had long since been ring-barked, chopped down, and sold as firewood.

While the Fawkes' garden was an affront to all their immediate neighbours, they themselves were not unpopular. They never complained about any of them. And when it came to factional fights between the Afrikaners and the English, or between the Ndebele and the Shona, or between the blacks and the whites - the Fawkes remained neutral. Indeed,

they negotiated peace. The Verwoerd children weren't allowed to entertain the Macimbi or the Mashita children in their own territory, and it was unthinkable that the Verwoerd children should ever visit the homes of the Macimbi or the Mashita children. (The Piggies don't come into this because they didn't have any children.) So the children gathered in neutral ground where there were trees to climb, snakes to catch; where there was wild fruit to gather, and thick bush to hide in; where they could watch the crested barbets nesting in the *Euphorbia ingens*, the sparrow weavers nesting in the *Acacia nilotica*, and the african hoopoes nesting in the eaves of the house. Elizabeth and her father helped them build a tree-house made out of wooden packing cases which, with the help of ropes, they secured high up in the *Commiphora mollis* - the elbow tree. When they built a den, deep inside the *Bauhenia galpinii*, Elizabeth provided them with a piece of old carpet and a few scatter cushions that she herself had made. There she brought them tomato sandwiches and cups of Mazoe orange. There she read to them, taught them songs about Jesus, and played 'I spy with my little eye'.

There were altogether eight Macimbi children living in the Hillside home, three of whom played regularly in the Fawkes' garden. The others were either too old or too young for that sort of thing. The little boy, Washington, was ten years old; the little girls, Florence and Nightingale, were nine and eight respectively. Of the fourteen Mashita children only two, the twin boys, Shakespeare and Wordsworth, played regularly in that little patch of Zimbabwean bush. They were nine years old although Wordsworth had been born twenty minutes after Shakespeare. The Verwoerd contingent was made up of a six year old boy with bat ears called Koejawel, and his sister, Komkommer, who had just turned five: the only one in the gang who had not yet started school. They had an older brother, Hercules, who was going into Form Two at Black Rhino High, and who was already showing great promise as a rugby player.

On New Year's Eve the Fawkes were off camping somewhere in the Matopos, but that did not stop the children gathering for games in the neutral acre that separated their homes and their parents. The three Macimbis climbed over the sagging three foot wire fence that marked the boundary between the scorched earth of their yard and *Ubungane*. The two Mashitas, identical twins incidentally, crawled through one of the gaps in the rotting wooden picket fence that marked the boundary between the mealie stalks of their yard and *Ubungane*. The Verwoerds, brother and sister - they had to cross a road, Lysander Avenue, the boundary between the pot plants and

plaster gnomes of their yard and *Ubungane* - they came through the gate. The Fawkes' watchdog, Bones, a black labrador cross beagle, barked only at the moon and growled only at the milkman, the postman, the newspaperman and the municipal meter reader. He always wagged his tail when he growled, to show them that he didn't really mean it but that it was expected of him. When they went away for a while, the Fawkes arranged with the children to feed their pets: Bones the dog, Gerty the goose, who was the same age as Elizabeth, Ronald the rabbit, Tim the tortoise, and a number of fowls among which only Mrs Noodle and her husband, Sir Percy, were completely tame. These two fowls were miniature English Game bantams while the others, kept in an enclosure, were large Black and Grey Australorps. There were twelve of them: eleven hens and a rooster called Earl Grey. The Fawkes ate their eggs but could never bring themselves to eat the birds. When they grew too old to lay they were given to their domestic worker, Mrs Amazambane, who took them home to her hungry family in Cornwall Crescent. There they were slaughtered, plucked, cleaned, boiled, and devoured. Some of their eggs were put under Mrs Noodle who was an excellent mother and who loved going broody. In this way the stock of Australorps was continually replenished.

Ubungane is a Zulu word meaning comradeship. The children called their den, the one they built with Elizabeth's help, deep in the *Bauhenia galpinii*, *Ubungane*. It was suggested to them by Mrs Amazambane who was a great admirer of the Zulu people and who liked to boast of a certain aunt, by blood, who ran a shebeen in Soweto. One night this aunt whose name was Lulu... yes, if you like, Lulu the Zulu... was walking home with her cash box tucked under her arm when she was accosted by two young Xhosa men - ANC types, no doubt - who demanded her money and her body, in that order. She acquiesced, in that order. She hit the uglier youth on the head with her steel cash box, so hard that he was still unconscious the next morning; then she grabbed the less ugly youth, pinned him to the ground under her massive bulk, pulled down his trousers and bit off his willy. The children were always curious to know what happened to the bitten off willy but they could get nothing more out of Mrs Amazambane.

By mid-morning all the children and most of the pets had gathered in their den. They were having a picnic. The Macimbis brought vetkoek and homemade ginger beer - lashings of it, the late Enid Blyton might have added - the Mashitas brought roasted mealies and watermelon, the Verwoerds brought kudu biltong, koeksisters, and a generous supply of their

mother's boerewors - the best in town. Anybody who has bought some at the annual Dutch Reformed Church fête will know what I am talking about. What's your secret Mrs Verwoerd? Ag, it's no secret, man. Use the choicest meat. Use the fat of a sheep's tail. Put lots of coriander. Do not pack too tight.

All the children except for Komkommer, who was too young, attended the local government primary school, which was called Kipling Primary. Washington was going into Grade Five; Florence, Shakespeare and Wordsworth were going into Grade Four; Nightingale was going into Grade Three, and Koejawel was going into Grade Two. Washington, being the oldest and the boldest, was the tacit leader of the gang. He also took it upon himself to inform the others of the mysteries of the grown up world. The grown up world began in Grade Seven with the well developed twins, Jade and Sapphire Trench, whose mother was an alcoholic and whose father had been hanged for murdering his ex-Woodwork teacher by stuffing his mouth with sawdust. At his trial Dolphie Trench claimed as mitigation the fact that Mr Tonker, the Woodwork teacher, had beaten him with a chair leg, not just once or twice, but nearly every lesson in his first year at high school. The presiding judge, who had also been taught Woodwork by Mr Tonker, was unsympathetic. He too had been beaten black and blue by the deceased. Didn't he, Judge Scroffles, still have the scars to prove it? Then the judge, in an unprecedented act, stood up, turned his back to the courtroom, pulled down his trousers and his pure cotton underpants, and bent over. There for all the courtroom to see were the vicious lumps and furrows, the result of repeated beatings, with a chair leg, by his old Woodwork master, Mr Tonker. The judge then challenged the accused to show his scars to the courtroom, which he did. The comparison was very much to the judge's advantage, not only because the accused's scars were less brutal, but because his underpants were not of pure cotton. The judge then went on to argue that if he, Ridgeback Scroffles, who had more reason to stuff sawdust down the Woodwork teacher's throat than the accused, didn't stuff sawdust down the Woodwork teacher's throat, then... now where was I?... oh yes - then the accused certainly had no excuse for... er... stuffing sawdust etcetera. The judge had no hesitation in finding Adolphus Trench guilty of murder in the first degree, and of sentencing him to death by hanging.

Jade and Sapphire Trench had been brought up to distrust, if not hate, the male sex; but this did not seem to extend to the male sex organ, in particular the one belonging to their new teacher, Comrade Ipayipi, who regarded

fornication with his pupils as a perk and not as rape. As a student at Valley Teachers' College, Comrade Ipayipi had had no success with the girls because he did not possess a motor car and because he could not afford to buy them smart clothes and expensive make-up. But things changed dramatically when, after three years at the College, he took up his first teaching post at Kipling Primary. He was given the Grade Sixes and he was put in charge of the stock room. This was last year. Jade and Sapphire Trench, beautiful and well-developed young eleven-year olds, charged with hybrid vigour, were in Comrade Ipayipi's class. He gave them the task of keeping the stock room tidy. He set work for the class - they were to copy out chapter one of their history text book, and then, for homework, they were to draw a picture of an Egyptian mummy - and then he summoned the twins to accompany him to the stock room which was situated next door to the Grade Fours' (Washington's) classroom.

The stock room was a cramped, dusty place, stacked with typical school stationery ranging from pencils to exercise books. If it was anything like the stock room at Black Rhino High, Boland Lipp would probably have likened it to Kafka's lumber-room in *The Trial* where, among the tumbled heaps of papers and ink bottles - old and empty in the book, if Boland's memory served him right - the Whipper administers punishment to the two snivelling warders. Certainly it was 'convulsive sighs' that Washington and his classmates in Grade Four began hearing more and more frequently behind the stockroom door.

In, out, in, out. The way Comrade Ipayipi moves his pelvis, he could be dancing to the latest Oliver Mtukudzi number. Sapphire is making little cries of pain; her teacher is making little grunts of ecstasy. Some of these sounds, these 'convulsive whispers', are picked up by the alert ears of those Grade Four children who always sit at the back of the classroom where there is a door, now never used, which also leads to the stock-room.

On this occasion, this bright, sunny morning of a school day, Washington was one of these children. At first they thought it was rats, then they thought there might be a bird trapped in the stock-room. Their teacher would not agree to their requests - certainly not during class time - to investigate. It was weeks before something like the truth dawned, not just on those Grade Four children who sat near the stock-room door, but on the Trench twins' classmates who were sick and tired of copying out their history books while either Jade or Sapphire, or both, accompanied their teacher on suspicious visits to the stock room. Rumours began to fly, even amongst the staff, but

nothing was ever done about it. The headmaster, Comrade Clever Ruforwokuda-Jones BA, was too busy with a Marxist-Leninist inspired project to convert the decadent colonial cricket, rugby, and hockey fields to maize. The maize would supply the school's kitchen, and any surplus would be sold to raise funds for the purchase of the complete works of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and Mao Tse Tung - for the school library. The fields were duly ploughed, fertilized, and planted. Most of the labour was performed by the children. The headmaster called it Education with Production. The first few seasons were good. Kipling Primary had bumper crops of maize. One or two ears went to the kitchen, one or two were stolen by boarders; the rest were appropriated by the headmaster and the school bursar who had been appointed on the recommendation of the headmaster and who was his cousin's aunt's nephew's sister. She was also his mistress during school hours. With the sale of these mealies combined with the school's General Purpose fees and the salaries of three non-existent teachers, Comrade Ruforwokuda-Jones was able to purchase a small farm on the outskirts of Bulawayo where he raised cattle, goats, pigs, and chickens. So you see, the headmaster of Kipling Primary was much too busy to bother himself with piffing rumours about teachers 'doing it' with pupils on the school premises. In any case, the conditions of service for teachers were so abysmal, why shouldn't they be allowed the odd perk?

On this occasion, this bright, sunny morning, the last morning in 1991, the *Ubungane* gang were not interested in the mysteries of the grown up world. Komkommer wanted a story. Elizabeth always told them stories. "Tell us about Tom Thumb, Washington?" she asked. Komkommer identified closely with Tom Thumb because she was the smallest in the gang and she loved to fantasize about saving them all from danger. They knew the story of Tom Thumb because Elizabeth, who layered all her stories thick with Christian sentiments, had told it to them many times. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," was the text she chose to precede the story of Tom Thumb, "and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

So Washington Macimbi, after he had washed down his vetkoek with some ginger beer, began: "Once upon a time, there lived a poor woodcutter, with his wife, six sons -"

"Seven," interrupted Nightingale.

"Not in my story," said Washington, "in my story there are six sons and a daughter, a daughter just like Kommie; and she's going to be Tom Thumb."

Komkommer shrieked with delight but Nightingale made an objection. “Then you can’t call her Tom,” she said, “because Tom is a boy’s name.”

“OK,” said Washington, undaunted, “then I’ll call her Thomasina.”

“You can’t do that, Washington,” Florence joined in, “she belongs to another story.”

“In any case, she’s a cat,” said Shakespeare.

“You don’t want to be named after a cat, do you, Kommie?” said Wordsworth with a laugh.

“I don’t mind, I like cats. I like boys too, so why don’t you just stick to Tom Thumb?”

“Oh, so you like boys, do you?” teased Washington. “Then I think I’ll call you Jade or Sapphire.”

“They’s jools, you know,” said Koejawel.

“They sure are. Comrade Ipayipi’s jewels. He wears them on his big finger.”

“Washington!” said his sister, Florence, “will you please shut up about that nonsense and get on with the story.”

“I was just going to say, you know,” said Wordsworth, “Tom is also a cat; it’s a boy cat.”

“Who cares? Just tell the story. Bones! Leave that food alone.” This was Florence who was inclined to be bossy. Bones had been sneaking up to the last piece of boerewors that, a little later, Koejawel gave him to eat.

“Right you are,” said Washington, “and Tom it will be. Once upon a time there lived a poor woodcutter...” Elizabeth’s version of the story ended where they all lived happily ever after. She had been shocked when Mr Lipp had informed her that, in the original, Tom is killed by the poisonous breath of a spider. She kept this information from the children.

After the story the children decided to play Hide and Seek. What little remained of the picnic they put in a plastic container and shoved in a secret hole just outside the den. Washington was on. He stayed in the den and counted to a hundred while the others scattered all over the garden. They had played this game so often that there were very few unknown hiding places left. Nightingale found one, however, behind the marula tree (Mrs Fawkes insisted on calling it *Sclerocaria birrea*), which grew close to the Lysander Avenue verge. The children never visited this corner because it was a gathering place for unemployed youths, some of whom were desperate. Today, however, it was deserted. The spreading branches of the tree began low enough down for Nightingale to climb it. In the first big fork of the

canopy there was a hollow. Inside this hollow Nightingale was surprised to see a parcel wrapped in newspaper and tied up in a plastic bag. She heard her brother shout "Coming!" The marula - sorry - the *Sclerocaria birrea*, was dense with foliage at that time of the year so Nightingale felt well hidden from her brother. She decided to help pass the time by opening the strange parcel in the hollow of the tree. It was with some difficulty that she undid the knot in the handles of the plastic bag. She had to use her teeth. She was surprised at how heavy it was. Treasure, she thought with a skipping heart; stolen goods, more likely. Carefully she shook the parcel out of the plastic bag and then proceeded to unwrap it.

By the time Washington and the others had found her, she had screamed herself into silence.

Chapter Five

Ingeborg Ficker, Bulawayo's premier artist, was holding a party for friends and fellow artists, at her farm off the Old Gwanda Road. Anybody who was anybody in Matabeleland's premier city would be there: ex-pat aid workers, South African refugees, ex-dissidents, rogue politicians, homosexuals, dope addicts, actors, serial killers, and writers.

Ingeborg Ficker's paintings were in demand in five countries all over the world: Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Liechtenstein, and Germany. These were all countries where past lovers of Ingeborg had gone to nurse their broken hearts and their battered genitals. In her paintings, mostly on giant canvasses bigger than tennis courts, there was one subject and one subject only: Ingeborg Ficker. She used only two colours: black and red. Her black pigment was made from the soot of charred dog biscuits, which she purchased by the ton, direct from the factory. She mixed the soot with mineral oil and the ejaculation of the Large White Boars that she kept on the farm for that purpose. Her red pigment, red-brown, actually, was made from her own menstrual blood. Her paintings stank horribly, which was part of their fascination. Anybody who was anybody in Bulawayo owned an Ingeborg Ficker. For commercial purposes she deigned to use smaller canvasses - table tennis size - so that connoisseurs could fit them into their houses. Through the years Ingeborg Ficker had painted over and over again, every aspect of her body: fully clothed, partly clothed, and stark naked. Sometimes she painted her body entire, sometimes she focussed on a hand, say, or a foot; but that part of her body which most fascinated her (and it's only fair to say that it was the part of her body that most fascinated her friends and admirers) was her vagina. This organ she had sketched, photographed, sculpted, and painted many thousands of times. Inspired by the Cern Abbas Giant, a poster of which she had had pinned on her lavatory door, she set about creating the Old Gwanda Giantess on some non-arable acreage of her farm. Two granite kopjes, one a 'whaleback', one a 'castle', formed her breasts; a severely eroded gully formed her vagina. For once in her artistic life Ms Ficker put aside her black and red pigments and began mixing - her farm labourers did it - forty gallon drums full of two parts whitewash to one part white PVA. With its connotations of racialism and chastity, white was not one of Ingeborg Ficker's favourite colours; but the ancients who did the Cern Abbas Giant used white, so she was fucked if she wasn't going to use white for the outlines of the Old Gwanda Giantess. She

envisioned that one day this monumental work of art would rival the Victoria (fucking imperialist bitch) Falls as a tourist attraction.

Ingeborg Ficker was one of the few, the very few, native born white Zimbabweans who had not been corrupted by colonialism. Not even her most radical friends, like Simon Snott and Nicholas Pus-Bottom, English expats who taught at Prince Charming High, would have called her a Rhodie. From powder-blue safari suits to rugby, she despised everything Rhodesian. Her parents, by Rhodesian standards, had been liberal. In the election of 7 May 1964, they voted for David Butler of the Rhodesian Party, secretly knowing, of course, that he didn't have a hope against Ian Smith who won all fifty of the 'A' roll seats. Earlier, in December 1962, they voted against Winston Field and the Dominion Party that aimed at apartheid and independence for white Rhodesia. They had shied away from the emerging black nationalist parties like Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and Rev Ndabaningi Sithole's breakaway ZANU, but, by Rhodesian standards, they had been liberal. They had also been very wealthy. It was a source of terrible guilt for their children, in particular the highly sensitive Ingeborg, having to inherit a factory, four farms, houses in Harare and Bulawayo, and millions of dollars. Still, they managed to cope. Ingeborg's art was therapeutic in this regard. Even more therapeutic was the way she continually denounced her parents for being rich. She used epithets like 'fascists', 'pigs', and 'capitalists'. She inherited one of the farms - the Old Gwanda, a house in Harare, and a little over a million dollars. We all have our crosses to bear.

Ingeborg's current lover was a black South African refugee called Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi. He was a supporter of the Jogskeyites, and he claimed to have coined the slogan (which the PAC appropriated): 'One settler, one bullet'. He made a good living smuggling mandrax into Zimbabwe, and smuggling emeralds out of Zimbabwe. But his most lucrative venture, avidly supported by Ms Ficker because of its high moral content, was the disposing of unwanted babies for thousands upon thousands of mothers in Southern Africa. He'd started off modestly enough, operating in one or two of the smaller Zimbabwean towns like Gwanda and Chegutu, but demand for his services grew like wildfire and he expanded rapidly. He now controlled a network of operations that was vast and that earned very good money for a number of people in very different walks of life. He'd even considered forming a company, as a front, and then floating it on the Zimbabwean stock exchange, but one of his 'sleeping' partners, a man called Sudbury Bauls, had dissuaded him. Too risky, he'd said.

It had been through his smuggling ventures that Sobantu had discovered this inexhaustible demand for the disposing, dumping, it was sometimes called, of unwanted babies. Most of the girls and young women involved were poor but they were prepared to pay almost anything - in cash and in kind - for the service which Sobantu offered: to relieve them of the responsibility of having to abandon their babies. He had what he called scouts posted near schools, colleges, universities, markets, nunneries..., wherever girls and young women were to be found in large numbers, all over Southern Africa, but concentrated in Zimbabwe. These scouts found out which of the girls had unwanted pregnancies, when they were due to give birth, where they would be giving birth, how much they could afford to pay, and then arranged to dispose of their babies, discreetly and efficiently. Although this venture made a lot of money for Sobantu and his partners, sleeping or awake, they liked to think of it as a service and not as a business. Unfortunately, the larger the venture grew, the less discreet and efficient became the disposals, and babies were being discovered in dustbins, in river beds, and in hollow trees. Luckily for the mothers, however, police men and women tended to be most reluctant to pursue cases of baby-dumping for fear that they might uncover their own or their superiors' babies!

Ingeborg's party was set for no special time. There was nothing bourgeois about Ingeborg. As early as sunrise, guests began drifting in, most of them coming directly from an all-night Old Year's Eve party at this friend's house or that hotel. Already an ox was turning on the spit - not on its own volition, you understand, but with the help of two of Ingeborg's labourers who had also slaughtered the ox and skinned it and gutted it and prepared it in every way for the delectation of Ingeborg's guests: all highly sensitive, highly perceptive, and, yes, in their own ways, highly moral people. Their palates could not tolerate tough, tasteless beef. And don't think Ingeborg's labourers - there were others in the kitchen and the scullery - were in any way being exploited on one of their rare holidays. For goodness' sake! If I know one person in Zimbabwe who has the worker at heart, who cries out (quite savagely) against exploitation, who once chopped off the first digit of the little finger of her left hand - it was in front of a large invited audience - as a protest against man's inhumanity to man - then that person is Ingeborg Ficker. No, these workers were not being exploited. How could they be? They too were guests. Yes, they'd been invited to the party just like anybody else. And, tell me something: do you hear them calling Ingeborg 'Madam'? Well, do you? No. They call her 'Ingeborg'. They are equals.

They even screw her occasionally.

Among the first guests to arrive were Simon, Nicholas, and partner. They were driving a battered grey Datsun 120Y, which one of their students at Prince Charming High had stolen for them from the home in Suburbs of an elderly white widow and an elderly white poodle. Both the widow and the poodle had put up a spirited resistance, but they were no match for the three nineteen year old boys, who concussed the widow with a coffee table and kicked the poodle so high - its name was Bouncing Boy - that it bounced off the garage roof, bounced off a forty gallon drum which was being used to collect rainwater, bounced off a pot plant (a begonia, I believe), bounced twice on the ground, and then never bounced again. The boys didn't feel too bad about roughing up the old lady and killing the dog because they'd heard from the mother of one of the boys who'd been the widow's 'housegirl' for fifteen years, and who put the boys up to the job, that the poodle slept with its mistress and that she had trained it to lick her privates by dabbing them with Oxo. And the expats didn't feel at all bad about it because both the poodle and the old lady were fucking Rhodes.

The partner who accompanied the ex-pat teachers, and whom they were sharing, was a very pretty black girl, a teacher from Kipling Primary School, which was situated in one of the low density suburbs of Bulawayo. Her name was Angelina. Simon and Nicholas could not pronounce her second name so they didn't bother with it. On the way out from town, they took it in turns to fuck her in the back of the car. By the time they got to Old Gwanda farm they were all pretty shagged out - Ingeborg and Sobantu were still fast asleep in one of the bedrooms - so they curled up on the verandah and caught forty winks. It was about seven o'clock in the morning; the sun was already more than comfortably warm. There were a lot of acacias growing around the homestead, and the karroo, in particular, was flowering profusely: fluffy yellow balls, sweetly scented: almost sickly sweet. Bees were noisily gathering pollen, and a few stray cattle were browsing on the foliage. On a dead branch on the very top of the acacia nearest the homestead, a male rattling cisticola sang, his conspicuous black palate blending beautifully with the golden-yellow flowers at his feet. Ingeborg's labourers slowly turned the crackling ox.

She was still fast asleep, entangled in the long limbs of her current lover, one who promised to be a little more resilient than her previous lovers. A 'lover', in Ms Ficker's hard brown eyes, was one - male or female - who had fucked her, or been fucked by her, at least twenty times. Anything less

denoted a casual acquaintance: a one-night, or a one-week, or a two-week stand. Once she had a man or a woman in her thrall, she discarded him or her, and they went crawling off to places like Vaduz, Liechtenstein or Mbabane, Swaziland, where they would make several suicide attempts, write a lot of free verse, become vegetarians for a while, and then return to normal. Sobantu had been Ingeborg's lover for more than six months - a record - and was showing no signs of becoming enthralled by her. What did enthrall him was her money.

By the time the next lot of guests had arrived, Ingeborg and Sobantu were awake and copulating. Ravi Chunder, Jealous Umbankwa, and Gymnogene Pigge, sharing a joint - their seventh since midnight - squatted outside Ingeborg's bedroom door and listened, giggling, to their hostess making heavy weather of it. All three of them had, at one time or another, enjoyed a one-night stand with Ingeborg, so her "Oh my guhds" and her "Yas yas yases" and her "deeper deeper deeper"; her groans, her gasps, her screams very much like the noises women make in low budget porn movies - came as no surprise to them. What did surprise them, however, was that, half an hour later, with unflagging intensity, she was still screaming variations of "Oh my guhd. Yas yas yas. Deeper deeper deeper." The three friends were more interested in dope than in sex and their little sessions with Ingeborg had been over in minutes, if not in seconds. So, giggling no longer, they left the lovers to it and went over to inspect the roasting ox, taking exaggerated care not to waken the people who were sleeping on the verandah. Ravi was a Zimbabwean of Indian descent. He was a full time poet; in other words he was unemployed, dependent on his friends for dagga, food and shelter. His family had long since disowned him. He was about thirty-five years old. Ravi wrote love poems and political poems. His love poems - in content though not in form - were Petrarchan: poems of unrequited love, poems which described with terrible longing, beautiful and unobtainable maidens with damask roses in their cheeks and something a little more tropical than cherries in their lips: pomegranates, usually. His political poems were strongly polemical, and they tended to rhyme a lot more than his love poems. In them he denounced Zionist Israel, Apartheid South Africa, and Fascist Uncle Sam. He denounced racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and - somewhat irrationally - ventriloquism. He thought, it seemed, that any word ending in -ism denoted something evil. And he had no dictionary at his elbow, as Boland Lipp, for instance, would have had, to check into these things.

Jealous was a dissident turned wood carver. After the President's amnesty in 1987, he left the bush, turned in his AK47, and briefly joined a market-gardening co-operative. Growing vegetables, however, was not his style, so then he joined an arts and crafts co-operative and began carving mother and child motifs, which were popular with tourists, especially free-spending Americans. The line he used to sell his carvings - and it was the truth - was that this same knife he now used to carve his mother and child studies, he had also used to kill a number of real mothers and real children. This thrilled the tourists, and they bought Jealous Umbankwa's carvings even though his technique was poor and his prices were exorbitant.

Gymnogene Pigge had come out from England, via India, shortly after Zimbabwe's independence in order to help actualize, as he put it, the fledgling country's road to socialism. That was the reason given by Gymnogene Pigge. He said nothing of the debts he'd left behind in England, the pregnant girls he'd left behind in India, and the presence in Bulawayo of a wealthy, childless aunt and uncle whom he'd intended to milk and whom he had been milking from the day he'd arrived in Zimbabwe, ten years ago. What his friends saw in Gymnogene, and anybody who was anybody in Bulawayo, could claim Gymnogene as his friend, was the man's charming smile, his beautiful BBC accent, and his Harris Tweed jacket with worn leather elbows. He was a master in the art of conversation and this made him an asset at any party. Some of his less uncritical friends, however, did notice that the same old stories kept coming back, party after party; and one person - I shall no longer call him a friend, and I am happy to say that he is no longer part of the Ingeborg Ficker circle - actually accused Gymnogene Pigge of becoming a 'boring old fart'.

In Ravi Chunder and Jealous Umbankwa, Gymnogene found devoted listeners, a devotion that was being tested to its limits now as they stood watching Ingeborg's labourers - sorry, friends - turning the spit, and listening to their English friend in the worn Harris Tweed, and a smile still charming after twelve hours on the binge - that impeccable accent - listening to him - telling them for the umpteenth time how he had seen this Harris Tweed hanging up in one of those Oxfam shops in London; how cold he'd been - it was mid-winter - dressed only in a T-shirt and a ragged pair of jeans; how he'd got talking to the elderly lady who ran the shop - he didn't have a bean on him - and told her how much she reminded him of his own mother who was dying of cancer, and what kind blue eyes she had; how taken she'd been with his accent which, she said, sounded exactly like her hero's, Prince

Charles; and how bowled over she was by his charming smile; how concerned she became when he told of the time he nearly drowned in the sacred River Ganges (she wasn't to know that he'd been humping some peasant under the water at the time) and how only by thinking of his dear mother - "So much like you, Marm" - could he keep panic at bay and thus save himself from drowning; how, in short (since more guests were arriving), the elderly lady had given him the Harris Tweed in exchange for a kiss and a hug.

The next lot of guests announced their arrival with a deal of hooting and shrieking and Happy New Yearing. They too had been up all night at a party in town, where they had been joined by Simon and Nicholas and Angelina Umqobompunzi, and where they had listened enthralled - since it was their first hearing - to Gymnogene Pigge divagating on his experiences in India. They arrived in a Range Rover belonging to one of the many aid organizations that sponsored Fark Ruckles and his girl friend Doss. Fark was a Canadian sociologist doing his PhD on *The Ramifications of Steatopygia in Unmarried Women Aged between Thirteen and Seventeen along the Confluence of the Nuanetsi and Save Rivers*. Doss was a Dutch psychologist doing her PhD on *The Psychological Ramifications of Steatopygia in Unmarried Women Aged between Thirteen and Seventeen along the Confluence of the Nuanetsi and Save Rivers*. Their research dovetailed quite nicely. They were attached to the University of Zimbabwe but many other institutions were interested in their research, which was regarded as vital to the moral, spiritual, physical, and indeed, material, advancement, not only of Africa - though primarily of Africa - but of the entire world. They were being sponsored by no less than seventeen aid organizations throughout the world: fifteen from Canada, one from Holland, and one from Sweden. The Canadian organizations thought that native Africans - Afrikaners excluded - were a far worthier cause than their own native Canadians who didn't know the meaning of gratitude and who, in any case, were just a bunch of troublesome piss-cats. PABBB, emblazoned on the sides of the Range Rover that had just pulled up to the Old Gwanda farmhouse, was by far their largest donor. It was a government aided charity based in Manitoba and it stood for the Protection of Africa's Beautiful Big Bums.

Fark and Doss had a love-child, a little girl not four months old whom they had named Mpfimbahongonyi, the Shangaan name for the tree wistaria, and who was at that moment being baby-sat by their domestic worker's daughter who was seven years old. Accompanying Fark and Doss was an

Irish drama teacher who specialized in community drama and whose name was Kathleen O'Toole-bag. Kathleen, a PhD student from Trinity College, Dublin was making a study of 'township' drama in Bulawayo's high density suburbs - what the old Rhodesian regime called 'locations'. She was also doing a lot to popularise indigenous drama and a few of her productions had already toured the provinces to great critical acclaim. When her production of *Riders to the Veld* was playing at the Bulawayo Theatre, Boland Lipp took his Upper Sixth students to see it. It had been billed as an Ndebele folk drama, and the English teacher from Black Rhino High was amazed at how 'Irish' an Ndebele folk drama could be. There was one line - something about spitting and being astride the moon that was strongly reminiscent of JM Synge. And where, if not in one of GB Shaw's plays, had Boland come across the words: "Not bloody likely"? Then there was the place where the protagonist in the Ndebele drama meets his love: the Salley Gardens. She (the love) lopes past these gardens with "little tar-black feet"! Boland knew his WB Yeats. Coming away from the play, Boland Lipp could only conclude that the Irish writers had been great plagiarists, and that they had stolen some gems from Ndebele culture. Ms O'Toole-bag had gained a good deal of credibility from the local people because of her vociferous stand against the corrupting influence on African culture of decadent, reactionary, colonial art. Entwined in her arms on this sunny New Year's Day, was the Bulawayo playwright Skies Izindebe. Skies was chair of the Bulawayo Writers' Union, his wife was secretary, and his brother was treasurer. The Union received a lot of money from sympathetic donors, mostly from Canada and the Scandinavian Countries. The money was given in order to help promote the arts, writing in particular, in Matabeleland. As chair of the Union, Skies Izindebe had used these funds to take him and his group of players (mostly relatives) on world tours, to London, to Paris, to Rome, to Moscow, to New York, where his plays were ecstatically received, and from where he purchased essential equipment such as video machines, televisions, pop-up toasters, and Scotch whisky.

The third couple to emerge from the Range Rover were the notorious 'goffel' gays, Porteous and Rigby. Porteous was the 'male' partner: a body-builder who worked as an instructor at a gymnasium called *Bodylines*. Most of his clients were middle-aged white women with faces like bleached prunes and bodies like bleached biltong. Ignorant of his alternative life-style, these women, mostly married to wealthy businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants, would flirt outrageously with

him. And he charmed, not the pants, but the twenty-dollar bills off them. These women were a variation of the old woman who lived in a shoe: where she had so many children she didn't know what to do, they had so much money they didn't know what to do, that is, after they had paid for their designer tracksuits, their Reeboks, their sheep's foetus wrinkle creams, their weekly perms at Rigby's - yes, Rigby, the 'female' partner, was a ladies hairdresser - their most recent antique: a Chippendale chair, perhaps, or a Spode cup and saucer, their vitamin F oil and Ginseng tea, their conversational French teacher... to name a few typical expenditures. Of course the husbands covered the big expenses: the overseas trips two or three times a year, the new car every two years, the plastic surgery, and so on. But there was always money left over - loads of it - and some of this money found its way into the ample pockets of that charming 'coloured' gentleman with the magnificent physique.

Of course his clients all knew that Rigby was gay. He was very camp. But you'd expect that of a ladies hairdresser, wouldn't you? His clients, too, were mainly youngish to middle-aged white women who felt they were living very dangerously to have their hair touched, let alone their scalps massaged, by a homosexual! I mean, their husbands were all so manly, what with their rugby injuries and their beer bellies. Their husbands would listen with amused tolerance to their accounts of Rigby: his high-pitched, nasal voice, his limp wrists, and his mincing walk. Talking among themselves at their numerous tea parties, the wives would be a little more daring. For instance, Daylene Twot would say how safe she felt with Rigby because he posed no sexual threat; then she would contradict herself by sighing and saying what a waste it was for such an attractive man, really, to be queer. Only chaffing of course! But still!

Shortly after the arrival of the Range Rover party, Ingeborg and her lover emerged from their bedroom reeking of discharge. They kicked the verandah party awake and moved outside. Ingeborg shouted to her guests in the kitchen to bring out the buck's fizz, then she shouted to her guests attending to the ox on the spit to slice a few cooked bits and pass them round. Finally she shouted to her guests in the scullery to get a fucking move on with the washing up. Then she went round hugging those guests, kindred spirits - we know a fucking Rhodie when we see one - who were not normally employed by her. Even as she hugged, more friends were arriving. A huge silver Mercedes Benz pulled up next to the Range Rover. What made this symbol of the worst aspects of capitalism acceptable to a gathering of

radicals was that it wasn't strictly owned by its 'owner'. After all, it had white number plates. It was a government vehicle. Behind the wheel, his enormous belly pushing up against the dashboard, pressing down on the hazard switch, was the Minister of Pavements and Grass Verges, Comrade Habakuk Cheti. Accompanying him was his Matabeleland North mistress, a sixteen year old school girl from Black Rhino High called Beauty Ruforwokuda-Jones. Her father was headmaster of Kipling Primary School. Comrade Cheti kept mistresses, he called them escorts, in each of the Zimbabwean provinces. He and Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi had done a lot of business together. To date, the latter had arranged for the disposal of seven unwanted Cheti babies.

"Hey, Gymnogene! I want a word with you." Gymnogene turned to Sobantu and gave him a charming smile. In his left hand he held a glass of buck's fizz, in his right a generous slice of juicy prime beef. His stubbly chin was covered in grease. So was his forehead. So were his balls if the truth be known; he'd been scratching there with his right hand.

"Delighted, old boy," said Gymnogene, "shall we take a stroll?"

"Don't call me 'boy', old boy. I'm touchy about that."

"Sorry about that, old man."

They walked together in the direction of the pigpens. High above them in a cloudless sky seventeen Abdim's storks circled. Neither of the men noticed these migrants from North Africa. Elizabeth's mother, had she been at the party on Old Gwanda Farm, would have noticed them. She would have been enchanted but also quick to point out that *Ciconia abdimii* was disappearing from Zimbabwe. She remembered, as a child, the flocks that used to roost in their hundreds in the blue gums that grew around her grandparents' homestead. But of course, Philippa Fawkes would never be invited to an Ingeborg Ficker party. She was too square. Too fuckin' establishment. Only anybody who was anybody got invited to an Ingeborg Ficker party.

As they walked, Gymnogene took sips from his buck's fizz and bites from his slab of beef. Sobantu picked his teeth with a piece of grass. He said, "You made a right balls up of that last consignment, didn't you?"

"I beg your pardon, old b... er... man?"

"One of them was found yesterday by a bunch of kids, shoved into the fork of a tree, right near your uncle's house."

"Oh no!" Gymnogene tried to sound alarmed but he was not very convincing. "I thought it was a perfect place. Dense bush all around. More or

less deserted.”

“The tree is in somebody’s private garden, for shit’s sake. How could you be such an idiot? It’s going to get into the newspapers. There’s going to be investigations.”

“Oh Lord!” Gymnogene drained his buck’s fizz and threw the glass onto the ground. After all it was not his glass. He concentrated on the delicious beef. The grease was beginning to congeal. “What do you want me to do, Sobantu?”

“It’s too bloody late for you to do anything about that one. Just be more careful in future. You know, I’ve got a lot of shareholders to satisfy; I can’t afford to close this business down. I’ve told you before, if you can’t get rid of them entirely, dump them in public places - school dustbins, municipal lavatories, factory sites; not, for shit’s sake, private gardens, especially when the owner turns out to be some fucking do-gooder.”

The last piece of beef went down Gymnogene’s throat. He felt deeply satisfied. He wiped his hands on the leaves of a white stinkwood that cast a lovely shade over the pathway. They paused there a while before turning back to the party. “Sorry old chap,” said Gymnogene, and he gave his boss a friendly pat on the shoulder. “I shan’t do that again. By the way, you owe me for three dumpings.” He held his right hand under Sobantu’s nose and rubbed his index finger quickly against the ball of his thumb. He smiled his charming smile.

“I’m not paying for that balls up,” said Sobantu huffily. He put his hand into the back pocket of his trousers and pulled out a wad of notes. “But you can collect for the other two. Do you want it in rands, dollars or pulas?”

“Dollars for now, if you don’t mind; I’ve got a few debts to pay in town.”

“I bet you have.” He handed Gymnogene two twenty dollar bills, then they walked back to the party which was already beginning to swing.

Chapter Six

Elizabeth could not get back to sleep. She had kicked off her blanket and was lying on her back with her arms folded behind her head. Both her parents were snoring. She stared up at the roof of the tent. It might have been the egg inside her bra that kept her awake; it might have been the mild indigestion she felt from having eaten too much relish at supper time - all that green pepper; it might have been nothing more than her parents' snoring; but she wasn't thinking of the egg, or the indigestion, or her mother and father: she was thinking of Jet Bunion, his proposal as well as his baby-blue eyes.

She listened to a pair of spotted eagle owls calling to each other. (Philippa is fast asleep so we won't bother with the Latin.) She listened to some nocturnal creature scratching around outside the tent. Probably a genet looking for scraps of pork sausage. She was feeling stifled; she must get out, have a look at the moon: 'With how sad steps, O Moon...'; feel the breeze coming off the water. Carefully and slowly she unzipped the tent flap and crawled into the night. There was the moon, small in its last quarter, but giving enough reflected light to raise a glow on Elizabeth's exposed skin.

...thou climb'st the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!
What! may it be that even in heavenly place
That busy archer with his sharp arrows tries?
Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case:
I read it in thy looks; thy languish'd grace
To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.

"I wish that had been written by a woman," Elizabeth sighed. Then she thought, I must ask Sir to do more women poets with us. Mr Lipp had a theory though, that all the truly great poets, whether male or female in body, had androgynous sensibilities.

Something compelled Elizabeth to search the large, flat-topped granite boulder, just to the right of their encampment, which jutted out over the dam. She had sat there for part of the day, reading *Great Expectations*. Now, right on the water-edge of this boulder, which was covered in grey and yellow lichen, barely discernible in the moonlight, perched a klipspringer. Its

hooves were together, like a four-leaf clover. It seemed to be looking at the girl. She could not tell if it was male or female. Her heart lifted. She took a step towards it and it bounded off. She walked to the rock, climbed it, and stood where the little buck had stood. She was barefoot but her mind would not dwell on night adders and centipedes. She sat down, then she lay down. There was room for two people on this rock. Two people could make love, under the moon, on this rock. She was on her back. She pulled her tracksuit top above her navel and began to tickle her tummy. She lifted her knees and parted her legs slightly. "Oh Jet," she murmured, "oh Jet, I love you. I love you. I love you."

Jet Bunion was one of those boys - young men, really - who could charm everybody from toddlers to geriatrics. There was no shortage of girl friends in Jet's life and, God knows, Elizabeth Fawkes was no sex kitten. Why then should he have displayed such an interest in her? Not only did he find her physically plain (though she did have a beautiful complexion), but she was a 'happy clappy'; and if there was anything Jet Bunion despised it was a 'happy clappy'. Unlike the majority of his peers, he was not put off by her academic brilliance; neither did it turn him on, however. Yet he had made this proposal to her: "Fawksey," he had said, "if you let me make love to you on the summit of a dwala, on a night when the moon is full, I will be 'born again'." Fawksey's face had become an instant beetroot and she had stumbled away without a word. It had been at school, on a Monday morning between periods. Jet was coming from an English lesson with Mr Lipp, and Elizabeth was going to an English lesson with Mr Lipp.

That was the lesson they had read and discussed Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet, 'With how sad steps...'. It was a lesson that had stuck in Elizabeth's mind because, during the course of it, Mr Lipp had shocked the class by reading out aloud the word 'piss'. The word came in the first line of Philip Larkin's deflating reply to the Sidney sonnet. Larkin, Elizabeth suspected, was Mr Lipp's favourite modern poet. When Larkin died, he'd stayed away from school for more than a week.

That's how the moon affected him, he'd told the class in one of his rather too frequent confessionals - the lonely middle-aged man - "For me, like Larkin, it is a 'reminder of the strength and pain of being young; that it can't come again,/ but is for others [you kids!] undiminished somewhere'."

The discussion had ranged from water divining to bio-rhythms and witchcraft, all a little too 'new age' for Elizabeth's peace of mind. Mr Forskine, their science teacher, got very worked up about satanical pursuits

like the so-called ‘Greens’, ‘Earth-watch’, ‘Mandate’ and whatever. The born-again Christians had to find an anti-christ to match the proportions of their old arch-enemy, communism, which was in the process of dying out. The demise of communism had been a great blow to them. How can the good remain strong if they have no enemy? “Without the devil, God wouldn’t exist” was one of Jet Bunion’s favourite pronouncements; “God and the devil are one”, he would call out during a science lesson with Mr ‘Wonderful’ Forskine. The science teacher would keep his cool. After all, the Bunion boy was out on a limb. In any case the real culprit was that English teacher with the green eyes. Talk about a serpent! It was he who stuffed the pupils’ heads with diabolical nonsense. The school shouldn’t allow it. On Valentine’s Day, the year before, Mr Forskine had received no fewer than thirty valentine cards from no fewer than thirty of his female pupils. That’s it! The Bunion boy was jealous of him. Of course. Jet had received only twenty valentine cards: five of them from Elizabeth - but she’d left no clues. Mr Forskine was jealous of nobody except, perhaps (though he’d never admit it) the minister of their Church, Brother Moral MacBraggert. Brother Moral had received more than a hundred valentine cards. Of course it wasn’t really Moral who received these expressions of love, it was Jesus. Mr Lipp had received none. Green, unless you’re Robin Hood, is not a very sexy colour on a man. Now blue, particularly in its powder and baby shades, is another matter entirely.

Elizabeth pulled her tracksuit top down and sat up. She turned to face the water. The cool breeze brought with it a rich smell of nutrients. She breathed deeply. She had tried so hard to bring Jet over to the Lord. He shocked her with his contention that God was no more than an extension of the self. Descartes thought that the mysterious pineal gland situated deep in the brain was the seat of the soul. Jet was inclined to agree with this. “God is probably an eyelike gland of unknown function,” he once told Elizabeth. “If he lives anywhere it’s behind the third ventricle of your brain; certainly not in the sky! That’s just a common myth.” Elizabeth had prayed for him. Now she prayed again, as much for herself as for Jet Bunion. “Lord, help me to guide him away from the darkness, towards the light...” Even as she prayed, a part of her - the part that Boland Lipp nurtured - was anticipating Jet’s response, assuming Jet had heard these words. “It takes light to cast a shadow,” he would say. He loved paradoxes. “There is no good without evil. There is no life without death. God and the devil are one.” She recalled a line from a poem by Elizabeth Jennings: “Every mating means a kill.” And you can’t get

away from it by becoming a vegetarian. Plants are living organisms. That was her mother's point. What a muddle life is? How did Stephen Blackpool put it? "... aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!"

Someone was climbing out of the tent. It was her father. "Lizzie," he called, "you all right?"

"I'm here dad, on the rock." He looked towards her. "Yes I'm fine, thanks."

He shuffled behind the wild fig; he needed a piddle. "That's the trouble with beer," he said.

She listened to him splashing against the tree trunk; heard him yawn. When he re-appeared she said, "Come and sit here for a while. There's a lovely breeze coming off the dam." He joined her on the rock. He gave her a hug and kissed the top of her head. They sat silently together facing the breeze. "You and mom were both snoring away like tractors."

"Is that why you left the tent?"

"No, not really. Got a few things on my mind."

"Care to share them with your old dad?"

"Well, there's this boy at school."

"Doberman Wick?"

"Dad! Don't interrupt. No, it's not Doberman Wick. I don't like him one little bit, even if he is a Christian."

"So the boy you've got in mind is one that you do like?"

"Dad! I said don't interrupt, okay?"

"Okay, my darling. Sorry."

"Dad, how can you be sorry with that big grin all over your face? You're teasing me." She laughed and punched him affectionately on the shoulder.

"Sorry." He moved his hand across his face. "See," he said, "I've wiped it off." They could barely make out the details of each other's faces. "Now, about this boy that you're madly in love with ..."

"Da. . .ad! I'll strangle you!" She put her fingers round his neck and squeezed gently. "I'm not madly in love with him, I just... well... I just like him a lot, that's all."

"Is it my boss's son, New York?"

"No, it is not New York, that conceited bully! It's..."

"Go on. Don't keep me in suspense."

"You don't know him, dad; his name is Jet... er... Bunion."

"Jetter Bunion?"

"No, not Jetter, man dad, Jet!"

“Oh Jet? Name doesn’t ring a bell. Is he handsome?”

“He’s very handsome.”

“Is he kind?”

“No, he’s cruel.”

“And you like him?”

“I can’t help it dad. I can’t always help what I feel, you know.”

Mr Fawkes detected incipient tears in his daughter’s voice. He put his arm round her shoulder. “It’s serious, isn’t it?”

She didn’t reply but she nodded her head. He could tell by her sharp intakes of breath that she was fighting back the sobs.

He said in a low, sweet voice, “Don’t let him rush you, my love. On the other hand, don’t you dawdle.” He touched her face and felt the wet tears. “You coming back to the tent?”

“Just now, dad.”

“All right, my girl. See you in the morning.” He climbed down the rock. “By the way,” he said, “how’s the egg?”

She sniffed deeply: “The egg’s fine, dad. Don’t worry, I’ll look after it.”

“I know you will, sweetheart. ’Night.”

“’Night.”

She watched her father disappearing into the tent then she turned back to the water, the rocks and the trees, and the incomprehensible sky. Jesus also loved paradoxes. Contradictions. It was Jet, not her preacher, who had pointed some of them out to her: “... for I came not to judge the world but to save the world.” And yet, in the Gospels, he is always judging: “He that believeth not shall be damned”; “He that is not with me is against me”; what are the parables if not oblique judgments? “Honour thy father and thy mother,” he says and yet, when one of his disciples asks him if he (the disciple) can go and bury his father, Jesus says: “Follow me, and let the dead bury the dead”. And in Luke, the Greek Gospel, he turns to the multitude and says: “If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother... he cannot be my disciple.” He exhorts us to be merciful but he himself is frequently vengeful - the way he strikes the fig tree barren because it isn’t bearing any fruit, even though it is out of season. Shortly before he tells Peter to forgive “until seventy times seven”. He says that whoever offends a little child “which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea”. How’s that for vengefulness? As for the trinity... what a load of comical nonsense! Trying to squeeze three into one. Dumas did a better job of it with

his three musketeers. Thus Jet Bunion - of the tortoise-shell plectrum and the tight little bum, not to mention the red crash-helmet and the Yamaha! On and on and on, ad nauseam. The trouble with the biblical religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam: was that they reduced mythology, which is beautiful and true, to a history (and even a science with some sects) that is ugly and false. Ask old Lippy. He says the Bible turns man against nature. That is why, now that Communism is on its way out, the fundamentalists are focussing the hatred that fuels their love on nature, and in particular, nature religions like Hinduism, Animism, and Pantheism.

Elizabeth had spoken to Brother MacBraggert about these issues but his advice had been only partly reassuring. He had said, putting his arm around her waist and pressing his gold signet ring into the small of her back, that the Truth of God's Holy Word would not reveal itself to over-educated homosexuals with communist leanings like our friend Mr Lipp, nor to upstarts too clever for their own good like our young friend Mr Bunion. Only if you believed that the blood of Jesus washed away all sins, that He was the Light and the Way, the Saviour, the Almighty, Conqueror... er... where was I? Oh yes... only if you believed in the Word, would it reveal its Truth to you. Elizabeth thought that this might lead to a catch 22 situation, that is why she was only partly reassured. Surely the Bible must speak to the unconverted? She didn't put this to her spiritual leader because, at the time, she was feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the pressure of a signet ring in her back, the close proximity of a most sensual Adam's apple, deeply penetrating powder-blue eyes, and a sickening whiff of cinnamon and musk.

Yes, Stephen Blackpool, poor creature, you are right: it's all a muddle. Elizabeth stood up to return to the tent. Should she or should she not take up Jet's proposal? Would it mean winning him or losing him? Was he sincere about becoming a Christian? Pre-marital sex was wrong, and yet... wouldn't it be a worthwhile sacrifice to make? Jesus would understand, even if her fellow Christians wouldn't. She felt a spasm in her lower back. Her period was coming on.

Chapter Seven

“Es war aber allda Maria Magdalena, und die andere Maria, die setzen sich gegen das grab....” The crystalline voice of Peter Pears, the Evangelist, in the closing stages of Bach’s *Matthäus Passion*. Boland Lipp had the volume turned down, too low for his taste, but he did not want to risk another sherry bottle. He had had to close all the windows and doors in the apartment in order to shut out some of the racket that was coming from Number Three. He was lying, supine, on his comfortable old divan; his eyes were closed, not tightly, and the tears were coursing down his cheeks. He did not hear the knocking on his door until the end of the recitative when the choir sings: *“Mein Jesu, mein Jesu, gute nacht.”*

He raised himself into a sitting position and swung his legs to the floor. Who could that be? He looked at his watch: nearly 8pm. You had to go through the kitchen to get to the outside door. The tone of Boland’s kitchen was set by marbled green tiles, green checked curtains and a green electric kettle. “Hang on, I’m coming,” he said to whoever it was standing outside on the narrow passage, which connected the three ground flats. He slid two bolts, clicked up a Yale lock, and unhooked a chain; then he opened the door. It was his little friend, Godknows Ilithanga from Number Three. Her normally shining brown face was the colour of ash. Her mouth was quivering with the effort not to cry. She looked at him imploringly. “Why, Godknows,” said Boland holding out his hand, “you look decidedly unwell. Come in, dear, come in.” She took his hand and he led her into the kitchen. “I’ll put the kettle on for some tea, shall I?” The girl then broke into uncontrollable sobs. Boland held her in his arms, saying “There, there” until the sobbing died down. Then he led her into the living room and bade her sit down. The final chorus of the *Passion* was coming to an end. The choirs were singing: *“Wir setzen uns mit tranen nieder”*. Boland could not bear to stop the music. He must let it play out. Only a few seconds more.

When it was over he switched off the record player and pulled up a stool so that he could sit near his visitor. Godknows had been more or less disowned by her family because she had been expelled from her school either for going to have a baby or for having had a baby - they could never determine which. No baby ever materialised, however. In truth Godknows had been pregnant for much of her Form Two year at Prince Charming High. The baby had been born in November the year before. Nobody had suspected anything because nobody at home or at school took much notice of

Godknows, and because she carried very small, and because her second-hand school blazer that she wore even on the hottest days of the year was about four sizes too big for her. The 'coloured' baby that had been discovered in the dustbin at Prince Charming High was not hers, though hers too had been 'coloured'. Her baby had been born at Cornwall Crescent, not in her parents' apartment but in Number Five. Her teachers, Mr Snott and Mr Pus-Bottom, had arranged for a midwife from a Bulawayo Hospital - one of their 'black pussies' - to help with the delivery. The children at Prince Charming High and at many of the other schools in Bulawayo knew that the English expats would help them get rid of unwanted babies. It was part of their contribution towards the rehabilitation of a country that had been corrupted and almost destroyed by colonialism, racialism, and imperialism. They wanted no money for their assistance. The occasional screw, perhaps - yes - but for Chris'sake no money. It was Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi who wanted money. He had shareholders to satisfy. Simon and Nicholas were just middle men, motivated by morality not filthy lucre.

It had been a relatively easy birth considering Godknows' tender age. The midwife, who earned more than double her meagre salary doing jobs for Comrade Ikheroti, took the baby away in a plastic bag. It was a little boy apparently. After the birth, Godknows spent two days in Number Five, sleeping and taking zitz baths - for she had been quite badly torn. Her family missed her vaguely but thought she must be with some friend or relative in another part of town. She often slept out because Number Three was so crowded, what with the Ilithangas as well as the Amazambanes living there. After two days she had to get out because another girl would be coming in to have a baby. She hadn't been back at school more than a couple of weeks, it was very near the end of the term, when the baby in the dustbin - oh, the long arm of coincidence - had been discovered and she, along with a number of other girls, had been summarily expelled.

"I'm in trouble, Mr Lipp, deep trouble." Godknows' voice was phlegmy: she barely opened her mouth.

Boland's voice was kind. He always spoke kindly to children, whether they were happy or sad, naughty or good. When he spoke to adults - most adults - his voice turned hard and cold, like stainless steel. Developed by a South African, you know. Stainless steel. Chap called Firth. I'd check that if I were you, Boland. Yes-no, I'd check that if I were you. "If I can help you in any way, my dear, I will. Trust me."

"I do, Mr Lipp, I do. I've been meaning to speak to you for a long time

but I've been so frightened." She stretched out her hand for his and he took it gently.

"You poor thing. Tell me what's happened? Is it your father again?"

"No Sir, it's got nothing to do with my father... or my mother, or my brothers and sisters... it's... it's..." she began weeping. Boland said nothing but stroked her hand. He turned his eyes away from her and looked for a while at the portrait of Paul Robeson. That's how God must have sounded to Moses and the others. Deep River. Praline.

Gently he let her hand rest on the arm of the chair, patted it reassuringly, and stood up. His knees creaked. "I'll just go and make us a nice cup of tea," he said. "Take your time, love." He moved into the kitchen and got ready some tea things. Deep River, Lord ... I want to cross over... he filled the kettle taking care not to waste a single drop of water... into camp ground. Doesn't make sense, but that's what it sounds like. Camp Brown, maybe? Campdown? Doo da, doo da.... Poor little thing. He fetched a clean hanky from his bedroom and took it to the child. She had stopped weeping. "Here love, wipe your eyes and tell me why you are so unhappy." Godknows thanked Mr Lipp, wiped her eyes, and proceeded to tell him in a wavering voice the whole sordid story.

Boland was stunned. He heard the kettle boiling - metonymy. Or is it synecdoche? Always confuse the two. Where's that dictionary? - and hurried into the kitchen to make the tea. He brought back a tray with a teapot, a jug of milk, a bowl of sugar - in very short supply - two cups and saucers, two teaspoons, and a packet of Mitchell's Highland shortbread, positively the best commercial biscuits in Zimbabwe. He set the tray down on a side table and waited for the tea to draw. He offered Godknows a biscuit in the meantime, and he was relieved to see her smile and take one. "And now they expect you to pay them one thousand dollars?"

"Or work for them for ten years as a slave prostitute. Honestly, Sir, I'd rather kill myself."

"I don't suppose those ex-pats are in tonight; it's New Year's Eve, you know." And it's my birthday. Fifty year old goat. "I'll catch them as soon as they get in and have it out with them. Bastards!"

"No don't Sir, please." (The girl called Boland 'Sir' not out of obsequiousness but because he was a school teacher. At Boland's school, Black Rhino High, where all the children came from comparatively wealthy homes, 'Sir' was Synonymous with 'Hey you!' Godknows, who came from a comparatively poor home, said it with respect and affection, never with

obsequiousness or contempt.) “They aren’t to blame,” she went on, “they helped me. I don’t know what I would have done without Simon and Nicholas. My father would have killed me if he’d known about the baby. And they are going to help Jade and Sapphire too.”

“The Trench twins? The Reeboks’ grandchildren?”

“Yes, Jade and Sapphire. They’re both pregnant.”

“But, Godknows, they’re even younger than you!”

“I think they’re about twelve.”

“Twelve! I didn’t think girls that age could fall pregnant.”

“It’s quite possible, Mr Lipp. Girls have to become women very early in Zimbabwe. The men are forever demanding love. Besides, Jade and Sapphire are well developed for their age, you know.”

“Yes I know; but still! They’re at primary school!”

“Kipling. The men teachers there are bad.”

“So it was a teacher who did it? No wonder nobody respects us. Has the teacher (or teachers) been reported, do you know?”

“The twins told me that he was reported but nothing has been done about it. If the headmaster discovers that the girls are pregnant they will be expelled”

“What happens to the boys and men who make you girls pregnant?”

“Nothing, Sir. They just deny it. They mock us and call us whores.” Boland was seething with anger. He ground his teeth. He clenched his fists, which were barely strong enough to pound a hole in an inflated paper bag. He stamped his foot. Talk about Humbert Humbert! Hang on: wasn’t it Humboldt Humboldt? Hum- something, anyway. “And you won’t tell me who did it to you?”

She shook her head and would not meet his eyes. “I can’t.”

“Isn’t he going to help you with the money?”

“He knows nothing about it. Nothing.”

“Aren’t you going to tell him?”

“No.” This, in the faintest whisper, directed at her lap. She sipped her tea.

“Well, my dear,” said Boland, “I’m not going to press you on this; I can see you are in a lot of pain; but it makes... me... mad to think that he gets away with it and leaves you, a child of fourteen, to suffer the consequences. By God, it makes me mad!”

“I’m not a child, Mr Lipp,” Godknows smiled, looking up at him again. “I never was a child.”

In reply, Boland smiled back at his visitor and patted her ashen cheek. 'Like Dead Sea fruits that tempt the eye,/but turn to ashes on the lips.' Who said that? Then he said, "Don't worry about the money. I'll lend you a thousand dollars, interest free; re-payable before you die." Early Victorian? Not a well known poet. "I've got no one but myself to look after. I am loaded, my dear." He looked around for his dictionary. He had a powerful urge to look up the words 'metonymy' and 'synecdoche'.

"Oh Sir, you've taken such a weight off my shoulders," said Godknows putting down her cup and standing up. "I'd better go now. Ma's expecting me to wash the party things. Don't come to the door, I'll see myself out."

Boland already had his nose buried in his *Oxford Concise English Dictionary*. He was moving down the m's. "All right, lovey," he said, not looking up, "I'll have the money for you by tomorrow afternoon. Cheers."

"Cheers Sir, and thank you."

He dismissed her thanks with a gesture of his hand. He had found 'metonymy'. He may or may not have heard her clicking the outside door shut; he certainly did not hear her stopping, not at Number Three, her home, but at Number Two, the Wick's weekend residence, where her tentative knock was quickly acknowledged. Now let me see... metonymy... 'substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant.' Is 'kettle' an attribute or an adjunct of a kettle full of boiling water? Is the boiling water the thing meant? Mmmm. Let's try 'synecdoche', shall we?

Meanwhile, up in Number Four, the Reeboks were sitting stunned at their dining room table. They had abandoned their game of Spite and Malice and were staring out of focus, Mr in the direction of the bowl of plastic fruit, which adorned the centre of the dining room table, and Mrs in the direction of the vase of plastic (or was it silk?) flowers, which adorned the centre of the sideboard. They had just heard over the phone that both their granddaughters were pregnant and would not be returning to school in the new year.

Finally, the old man muttered "Colonialism", shortly after which - she always let her husband speak first in matters of grave import - the old lady muttered "Imperialism". Then, in unison, they muttered "Racialism". After this ritual they felt a little better and decided to continue with their game of Spite and Malice. Poor Mr and Mrs Reebok: if the news of the twins was not bad enough, the way Fergie had been buggering around recently, and the obvious strain in Charles and Di's marriage - poor little William and Harry -

was weighing heavily on their stooped shoulders.

“Oh Gawd, I feel so sorry for those little tykes, you know,” said Mrs Reebok picking up her cards and squinting at them.

“I beg to disagree,” replied her husband picking up his cards. “I’m sorry, Girly, but I feel they deserve everything they get, jong. Your turn.”

“Ronald Reebok, how can you say that about two innocent little children?”

“There’s nothing innocent about the twins, Girly; you know that as w...”

“I wasn’t talking about the twins, you old fool, I was talking about Prince William and Prince Harry.”

“Oh them! Sorry. I thought you were talking about Jade and Sapphire. It’s your turn.”

“Well, I wasn’t. I was talking about William and Harry.”

“Well why didn’t you say so?”

“I did.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did.”

“You didn’t.”

“Damn you, I did.”

“Oh, no, you didn’t.”

Thus Mr and Mrs Reebok. The argument went on for another thirty or so rejoinders; then Mrs Reebok threw her cards down and left the table while Mr Reebok threw his cards down and remained at the table. As to who won the argument, it is difficult to decide; better leave it at a draw.

Next door was empty except for a young woman who had recently given birth to a baby who had been sired by one of the highest men in the land. All that may be said of this man - for fear of recriminations - is that he drives a Mercedes Benz, he owns a million acres of land (mostly in Zimbabwe), his children, all with mediocre academic records, all win scholarships to universities in North America, his wife owns a chain of boutiques represented in seven countries, and he sports a vast belly. His hobby is the collecting and marketing of rhino horns. He is a great champion of traditional African custom though he himself prefers to wear tailor-made three-piece suits imported from London and Paris. Even his underwear is imported. The young woman, in great pain after a difficult birth - she had been in labour for eighteen hours - lay back on an alien bed in an alien room

and felt nothing but gratitude, first for the father of this unwanted baby who had agreed to pay for its disposal - Comrade Ikherothi had settled for a rhino horn instead of the standard \$1 000 - and second for the two Englishmen, teachers she believed, who had arranged the lie-in with maximum secrecy. The midwife who had attended to her had been rather rough but very competent-looking in her starched white uniform. The young woman had not been too ill to notice that throughout her confinement the midwife's attendance on her had been frequently interrupted by hanky-panky sessions in the other room with one or other, or both, of the young, good-looking expats.

What a way to spend New Year's Eve, she thought to herself. Still, she was grateful that she did not have to keep the baby. It might have ruined her promising career as a PRO for one of the hundreds of safari companies - her employer was a Mr B. Cock - that Independence had spawned. She must try to get some sleep because tomorrow another woman would be coming in to get rid of her baby, and she would need the bed. Faintly she could hear people arguing next door. Sounded like an elderly couple... going on about "Yes, I did," "No, you didn't." Why must people argue all the time? She stared again in amazement at the huge face on the wall opposite her - a blown up photograph - that had watched her giving birth. She wasn't to know that this was Trotsky. Underneath the grim portrait - such pale, pale skin! - she read, for the twentieth time, the maxims: 'Civilization has made the peasantry its pack animal'; 'Insurrection is an art, and like all arts, it has its laws'; 'Ideas that enter the mind under fire remain there securely and forever'. The young woman now knew these maxims off by heart but could not understand them. That face was very ugly to her but then all whites, she found, especially the men, with their thin lips and their long noses, were ugly. They stank too. She remembered with a shudder the time that man - very rich honkie who owned a garage in town - what was his name? Twit or Twat or Twot - something like that - the time he had offered her \$100 for a 'good time'. She'd been having a lonely drink at the Bulawayo Sun. She could not refuse such easy money so she'd allowed him to take her to a deserted place outside town - he'd insisted on doing it in the bush - where he slobbered and jerked all over her while she got covered in grass seeds. It had been all over in thirty seconds. Easy money, all right. But disgusting.

She tried not to think of the object she'd glimpsed, wrapped in newspaper, that one of the Englishmen had stuffed into a duffel bag and then taken away. She tried desperately not to think of it. She turned her face to the

wall on the left and stared back at Karl Marx. She recognized him. She also recognized the face on the opposite wall: it was Lenin, wasn't it? In the halcyon days of Independence when Zimbabwe called itself a Marxist-Leninist Republic, her schoolteachers had familiarized her with these faces. Stalin had been another one. But not Trotsky. She had no recollection of that whopping moustache, those eyes that hammered at you like... not an ice-pick, for crying in the bucket... the young woman, born and bred in heat and chronic drought, where even deep-freezes laboured to deliver the goods, would not have heard of an ice-pick. Axe will do.

Down in Number Three pandemonium reigned. The Amazambanes were throwing a party for their extended family, and the Ilithangas were throwing a party for their extended family. Every square inch of the apartment was taken up with human flesh devouring animal flesh (most of it derived from the Fawkes' chicken run) and drinking beer straight from the bottle. Men were urinating out of windows and women were urinating into flower pots. Someone had vomited over Mrs Amazambane's new pink dress with lace trimmings. Actually it wasn't a new dress: she had stolen it from her employer, Mrs Fawkes. Mrs Fawkes had been given it by a relation of hers who lived in North America. This relation had bought it from a Salvation Army store in Des Moines for \$3. It had smelt a little stale, but it had looked quite new. Mrs Amazambane had added the lace trimmings. Now some drunken idiot had vomited over her best party dress. She went to change into a pair of brown crimplene slacks still with its 'Made in Rhodesia' label, which she had stolen from her previous employer: a Mrs McMackmack. Well, what do you expect when domestic workers are so poorly paid?

Afrodite Fawkes, who was spending New Year's Eve with her binoculars, had phoned the police about the racket in Number Three but they hadn't bothered to respond. Why should they when half the people at the party were members of the police force? Mr Ilithanga, in fact, was a private detective who was doing a lot of good work flushing out subversive writers, beating them to a pulp and then ripping up their manuscripts. To this day neither Amnesty International nor Africa Watch have been able to trace the whereabouts of missing minor poetess, Bismark Iwuwu, who has been accused of writing that a senior minister was a 'poofa'. Mr Ilithanga knows where she is. At the bottom of a deserted mine shaft. He and two of his trusted colleagues put her there. First they took it in turns fucking sense into her; then they took it in turns beating sense out of her. Then they rolled up her manuscript, rammed it up her bum, and dropped her into the shaft.

Nobody calls our minister a poofa! Another of Mr Ilithanga's missions was the apprehending of mandrax smugglers, but, whereas he destroyed poetry manuscripts because they were not worth a bean on the black market, he tended to hang on to the mandrax tablets that he seized because they were worth a bean on the black market - millions of beans. He had a reliable contact, politically big in South Africa, called Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi, to whom he could sell the mandrax. Comrade Ikherothi had also helped him (for a price, mind you!) get rid of several unwanted babies.

And how was the widow Fawkes spending her public holiday? By squinting through binoculars at public lavatories. And she was getting plenty of action, even at this early hour. She was nearing the end of her second bottle of Sedgewick's Old Brown sherry, her favourite tippie. On a good day she could get through three and a half bottles of this excellent cooking sherry. She swung away from the entrance to the GENTS and made a sweep of the car wrecks. She stopped at the Vauxhall Velox. Her heart skipped a beat. Definitely something going on in there. Two distinct forms humping away. She willed one of them to be that creep, Boland Lipp. She'd love to be able to get him sacked, if not jailed. Blerry homo! It shocked and disgusted her that her niece, Elizabeth, should be taught by that pervert. Elizabeth herself had told Auntie Afrodite that Mr Lipp was an atheist. How can the school allow it? Well she - Afrodite Jewl Fawkes - had some influence at that school. Who do you think might be paying her a little visit later on? Yes, that's right: her ex-husband, Rudolph McMackmack, headmaster of Black Rhino High. Over the years Rudolph had paid infrequent calls, usually after Rotary luncheons, to the apartment of his ex-wife. She was, being now forbidden fruit, a wee bit sexier than Doef, and, barnacles notwithstanding, a wee bit more accommodating than a chutney jar.

There was simply not enough light out there for Afrodite to make a positive identification of the humpers in the Vauxhall Velox. Because she wanted one of them to be Boland Lipp, one of them resembled Boland Lipp; and because she wanted one of them to be Jet Bunion, one of them - though there was continuous interchange - resembled Jet Bunion. The strain on Afrodite's eyes was fierce. She had to swallow a lot of aspirin with her sherry.

There came a knock on her door. Rudolph's knock. Rap ra-ra-rap-rap, rap-rap. Balls on the race track, squashed flat! He'd come a lot earlier than she'd expected. She was swilling a mouthful of sherry when the knock came. Some of it went down the wrong way, so before he could take her in his

arms, Rudolph had to pound her back until the coughing eased. His eyes, enhanced by the blue of his safari suit, were spinning like catherine wheels.

It was Thomas Moore, Byron's friend. Irish melodies. Boland had looked it up. Very popular in his day. He'd also, before climbing into bed with a 'good night' tot of whisky in his hand, looked up 'synecdoche' in his *Concise Oxford*: Figure of speech in which part is named but whole is understood. Could you apply that to a boiling kettle? Poor child. What a name: Godknows! He left the curtain of his bedroom window slightly open so that he could feel the breeze on his skin. The moon, in its last quarter, gave him its blessing. While he sipped his whisky he lay on top of his duvet. Among his bedside reading was Bruce Chatwin's *What am I Doing Here*. He loved Chatwin's description of Howard Hodgkin's grandmother, Florence. He re-read it now, aloud, as if to a classroom full of pupils: "... in a black suit with a green hat, green artificial flowers, green blouse, green shoes, green umbrella, green bottles of champagne and a lot of green wrapped presents in a green carrier bag." Boland so loved the colour green. And Bruce Chatwin is one of the great stylists of contemporary writing. Must get my girls on to him.

Chapter Eight

Lunch was being served at last. Doef looked at her watch: it was half-past three. The intense heat of the day was over. Shadows lengthened across the lawn. Her husband had fallen asleep in his deck-chair, snoring like a tractor. No one, and there must have been a hundred guests at the party, was paying the slightest bit of attention to them - not even their host and hostess.

The food looked good, though. There was lamb on the spit, and kebabs, and rump steak. For the more health conscious, the women, mainly, there was chicken, and fillets of bream, and lightly grilled mushrooms. There were dozens of salads and puddings. The booze flowed. Not without effort, Doef roused her husband - he of the eyes that brought to mind that memorable line from Yeats's poem, *The Second Coming*: 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre...'. Coincidentally (oh, that long arm!) a baker's dozen of people, mostly women, gathered swooningly round the preacher, Moral MacBraggart, were discussing the Second Coming of Christ. Tracey-Lay Cock, Bulawayo's triathalon hope, wife of millionaire businessman and part time rancher, Boxer Cock, ardent Christians the both of them, had asked Brother MacBraggart if the Lord's return was imminent. (Actually she hadn't used that word; it isn't in her vocabulary; she'd used the phrase 'round the corner'.) Moral - 'call me Brother' - MacBraggart assured her that His return *was* just round the corner and that he sincerely hoped those sinners like the 'Greens', homosexuals, Roman Catholics, Atheists, Communists (driven to the bottom of the list by ESAP - how are the mighty fallen!), and other children of Satan were prepared to be burned in the everlasting fires of hell. This millenary talk greatly excited the people gathered round the preacher who was dressed, as Rudolph McMackmack had jealously predicted, in a powder-blue safari suit, no socks - how daring! how - I know you shouldn't say this of a man of God - but how sexy! how of the people! Only you could get away with it, in this company, Brother Moral; only you with the handsome brow, the playful yet serious lips, the postcard blue eyes (Rudolph's are positively grey by comparison), the shiny black Porsche, a later model than your host's, which you'd acquired (no questions asked) from a certain Sobantu Ikherothi; the power of healing in your right foot... now where was I? Oh yes, his attire. As I was saying: a powder-blue safari suit, no socks... oh the veins, the blue blue veins on those insteps... I must go on, I really must... and matching blue espadrilles, sweetly tapered at the toes.

Tracey-Lay Cock, despite her peak of fitness, was breathing heavily. Only Absalom, however, the sharp-eyed chief gardener deeply ensconced in the cannas, noticed that she was vigorously rubbing her thighs together. What Absalom couldn't have known - these people are savages after all - was that this action of Tracey-Lay's was an early sign of a spiritual visitation. Often the mere presence of Brother MacBraggart brought on these visitations, which seemed to be particularly strong among those ladies who worked out at *Bodylines*. At the Blood of Jesus Temple, during Sunday services, Tracey-Lay had been visited by the Holy Ghost (three times), by John the Baptist (twice), and by Samson (once). Here at the Twot's New Year's Day party it is still too early to tell who is about to visit her, but I'll let you know when it happens.

Boxer Cock and all the younger businessmen at the party, had become rich, and thereby Bulawayo's cultural elite, as a direct result of Zimbabwe's Independence. In ten years they had grown from travelling salesmen, apprentice plumbers, primary school teachers and post office clerks to managing directors who owned businesses, farms, and pretty but unintelligent wives. How did they achieve this, these (in normal circumstances) oafs? Simple: they had stayed on in Zimbabwe while the majority of their white comrades had fled, taken the gap, to other countries where people talked English, played rugby, and enjoyed barbecues. This mass exodus of people with established skills and years of experience, provided wonderful opportunities for unskilled and inexperienced men who could be trusted with the petty cash (this ruled out the blacks), if not their bosses' womenfolk, to rise rapidly in the worlds of commerce and industry. Furthermore, property prices at the time were ridiculously low. A four-bedroom house on an acre of land in a respectable suburb was cheaper than a second-hand motor car. Thousands of whites, in a panic to get out of the country before they were butchered in their beds by vengeful 'cook boys', almost gave away their belongings. It wasn't the 'cook boys' but the stay-at-home white salesmen, apprentices, teachers and clerks, who made killings, metaphorical killings. Boxer Cock, who had worked as a rep for a wholesale furniture company, started buying up good second-hand furniture from his fleeing compatriots. And when they'd all left, he started buying up good second-hand furniture from those compatriots who were too old or too sick to leave. He did particularly well out of widows who had no idea of the real value of their solid oak dressing tables and their yellow-wood dining room suites that they'd acquired half a century before. Actually his best 'killing',

always a conversational piece at parties where anybody who was anybody in Bulawayo had gathered, had been made not at the expense of fleeing or dying whites, but at the expense of a 'coloured' couple, Mr and Mrs Reebok, who were moving from their house in Barham Green to a flat in town.

"No, I'd heard that there was these goffels [laughter; good old Boxer] who were selling a load of katunda, [more laughter; what a guy to have at a party] including some interesting items of furniture. So I go along there dressed like a hote [peals of laughter; some back thumping; this boy's a wit] and I say what do you want for that junk? I can't believe my eyes. It's stinkwood painted green, would you believe? Chairs, tables, stools, a huge dresser, a sideboard, bookshelves... they tell me it's got sentimental value, came from their ancestors in the Cape. If you ask me, their ancestors probably stole the stuff from some voortrekker. [Very loud laughter, one gentleman with a big tummy is in tears - name of Sudbury Bauls.] I tell you what, I says, I'll do youse a favour [too much for one lady who literally falls down and rolls away screaming with laughter - name of Daylene Twot], I'll give you a hundred bucks for the lot and save you the expense of having to cart it away to some junk yard."

Boxer employed an old man on the verge of starvation to scrape the green paint off the furniture, then he sold it, an item at a time, to the wives and mistresses of his rich colleagues. Fifteen thousand dollars, minus the hundred he had paid the Reeboks and the twenty he had paid the old man, gave him a clear profit of fourteen thousand, eight hundred and eighty dollars, enough to buy his second farm: a modest five hundred acres with large 'character' homestead, numerous outbuildings, river frontage, dam, two orchards, vineyard, three hundred head of sheep, fenced on three sides... Boxer and all his business associates ran farms, for tax purposes, deliberately at a loss.

The headmaster and his wife sat there, bemused and not a little hung over, while the party raged about them. There were people queueing for food, fetching drinks, swimming, going down the water slide, dancing to the music of *Ipi Tombi*, or gathered in animated groups where they discussed those subjects dearest to their hearts like servants, government corruption, shortages, Jesus, and, above all, money. Snippets of the talk kept reaching their ears from different directions:

"...might have to sell one of the Mercs..."

"...Jesus doesn't want us to be poor..."

"...down to my last million..."

“...these people are all the same...”

“...preferred our first houseboat...”

“...they all steal...”

“...sick and tired of having to tighten my belt...”

“...praise the Lord...”

The one and only black guest who was a member of the Black Rhino High School Board - a token member, stood on his own a little distance away and stared at the sprinklers that were saturating the lawn. He had a beer glass full of neat whisky in his hand, from which he took the occasional gulp. His name was Nemesis Khuluphala and because of his political connections and his high rank in the civil service (before Independence he'd been a delivery 'boy' in the Department of Customs and Excise), because of his corruptibility, the prominent 'white', 'coloured', and Asian businessmen of Bulawayo found him very useful; very useful indeed.

Doef McMackmack noticed him standing there all on his own and decided to be sociable. "I'm going to have a chat with poor Mr Khulu...whatsit," she told her husband, "then I'll bring you a plate of food, Dolphie my dear."

"Bugger the food. Too fancy for my taste. See if you can dig me out another beer, there's a good girl. Look how that blasted hypocrite is carrying on." He was referring to the preacher, now totally surrounded by eager ladies, Daylene Twot included. Rudolph couldn't rid his mind's eye - which also had a tendency to gyrate - of the drawings he'd seen in the Twot's parlour - his hostess, in the most suggestive of poses. And way over there in a corner of the garden, in huddled intimacy with the man Rudolph McMackmack most feared - chairman of the school board, Sudbury Bauls - was the artist, Mr Craig Wick. Wick was one of the school's wealthiest parents. Wonder what the bastards are talking about? Looks like business. Probably discussing ways of getting rid of me. Well, it's time I retired. Get away from all those thankless bloody children and their thankless bloody parents. He spun his eyes back at the preacher, the school's official chaplain. Brother MacBraggert had his right hand in the air and was moving it about in a manner which suggested to Rudolph that he was either bestowing blessings upon the people who surrounded him or that he was trying to swot a troublesome mosquito.

Doef brought him his beer and then made her way to the lonely Mr Khuluphala. "Hallo, Mr Luluphuka," she said. Doef was always getting names mixed up. "Mind if I join you for a while?"

Nemesis was charming: "Not at all. It's Mrs McMackmack, isn't it?"

"That's right. Please call me Doef? You looked so lonely standing here all by yourself, so I thought I'd join you for a while."

"That's very kind of you Mrs... er... Doef." He took a gulp of whisky.

"I noticed you were looking at the sprinklers, Mr Kuphalulu: isn't it a crying shame?"

"Yes, they are not very effective, are they? I have a much better system at home: it's an overhead spray. Very efficient."

"Ooh but Mr Laphaluku, don't you think, in view of Bulawayo's water crisis, that you should stop using your sprinklers?"

"Please call me Nemesis. I am one of the lucky ones who is not affected, Mrs Doef. You see, I have my own bowser. Every day I fill it up with water from my factory allocation - I have two factories - then I put that water on my vegetables at home. I connect my spray system to my bowser and bingo! You should see my carrots and my tomatoes..."

"Well I must say, Mr Nesemis, I think that it is rather unfair of people like you and the Twots, to use all that water at a time like this. I mean..."

"Perhaps you're right, Mrs Doef," Nemesis smiled. Then he changed the subject: "How are things at Black Rhino High?"

"No fine, fine. Nothing to complain of there. Yes, no, fine, fine. Er... are you enjoying the party?"

"Yes I am, thank you. Are you?"

"Well, yes, I suppose. Not very friendly though, are they? These people..."

"Oh they are friendly enough when they need to be."

Doef found this reply a little enigmatic so she changed the subject. She asked boldly: "Why is it, Mr Nemephala, that so many of your people are dumping their babies these days?"

This question alarmed Nemesis because he thought, at first, that this ridiculous woman was being personal. He'd arranged for several babies, of his making, to be dumped - through a contact called Gymnogene Pigge: charming Englishman in a tweed jacket. His most recent baby, he'd heard, had been found in somebody's garden in one of the low density suburbs. Who was the mother of that one? There had been so many. Probably that domestic worker who forced me to rape her. Ungrateful bitch. Sent her packing back to the bush. No way they'll trace it to me. Too many friends in high places salivating for my money. "Can you be more specific, Mrs Doef?"

“What d’you mean?”

Nemesis drained his glass. “When you say ‘your people’, do you mean my own family, or do you mean the African people in general?”

“Oh no, no, no, Mr... er... of course I don’t mean your own family” - these people are so sensitive - “I wouldn’t dream... I mean... I’d never... er... can I get you another drink?”

Nemesis smiled sweetly at the purple clad marshmallow beside him, doing its best to blush, and suggested that he get them each a drink while she kept him a place in the food queue. “What is your pleasure? Whisky?” Doef thanked him, but no, nothing alcoholic. She’d had enough alcohol for the time being. What a polite person! Thorough gentleman! Teach those Europeans a thing or two about how to treat a lady. Pity they smell so. “Just a soda water thanks, Mr... er; with a dash of lime if you can find any.”

She took her place in the queue while he ambled off in the direction of the drinks. Two women in front of her, Mrs Wick and Mrs Smeckma, were talking about Mr Khuluphala in a way which suggested the African people in general: a figure of speech in which part (Mr Khuluphala) is named but the whole (the African people) is understood. Boland Lipp, where are you?

“Did you see him at the whisky?”

“I did. Neat. In a beer glass. It’s disgusting.”

“Just because it’s free.”

“I bet he drinks nothing but kaffir beer in his own home.”

“They’re all the same: something for nothing.”

“Sickening, isn’t it?”

When they got to the food, Mesdames Wick and Smeckma piled their plates with the fattiest pieces of lamb they could find, the crispiest pieces of chicken, and the juiciest rump steaks. That more or less filled their plates so the salads, grilled mushrooms, just a teeny bit of that delicious looking grilled bream... mmm... done to a turn, and the garlic bread, had to be piled on top. Later that night, in the privacy of their own homes, both women would force themselves to vomit it all up so that they could keep their figures in trim. It isn’t all roses, being somebody who is somebody in Bulawayo. Believe me.

Sudbury Bauls and Craig Wick were not talking about the headmaster of Black Rhino High, they were talking about money and related issues. Sudbury Bauls was one of the most successful commercial farmers in Zimbabwe. The secret of his success was simple: he kept his overheads down. In other words he paid those people responsible for making him rich,

his labourers, starvation wages. He built them no houses, no schools, and no clinics. They put up their own mud huts or tin shacks, walked to the nearest government school, which was fifteen kilometres away, and simply died when they contracted illnesses which castor oil couldn't halt.

Mr Bauls went in for mixed farming but his biggest money spinner was pangolins. He'd paid an American marketing expert a lot of money to persuade the people of Southern Africa that pangolin scales were a powerful aphrodisiac. Things went slowly until the government banned the exploitation of this rare animal that was regarded as sacred by some African tribes. Sudbury, with the collusion of some senior people in the government, the army, the police, and the Parks and Wildlife Board, went underground with his pangolins and everybody involved became very rich indeed. On the black market today, a single pangolin scale fetches between five hundred and seven hundred American dollars! The word is out among the peasants of Matabeleland that Baas Bauls pays five dollars (Zimbabwean) to any body who brings him in a pangolin. They'll soon be extinct but Sudbury doesn't give a fuck about that. In any case they're such ugly bladdy things to look at. I mean.

Mr Bauls's second biggest money spinner had nothing to do with farming. It was more of a charitable pursuit, Sudbury liked to think. He never talked about it with anyone except those who were directly involved with him. Even with these people he forbade the term 'baby dumping'. For fuck's sake, he had three children of his own. He doted on them, young Lace in particular. No, he liked to call it 'helping out unmarried mothers', even though more than half the mothers he and his colleagues 'helped' were actually married. Hard to tell with these people, who's married and who isn't. Deep down Sudbury knew that this was a dirty business he was involved in, so he kept his distance from it, invested in it as a 'sleeping' partner. In any case the profits that poured in were used mainly in philanthropic pursuits like the creation of Black Rhino High, the commissioning of the twice life-size statue of Moral MacBraggert outside the Blood of Jesus Temple, and the building of a new rugby stadium for the edification of all true Matabeles. So, what the hell!

Both Craig Wick and Sudbury Bauls had had, had, and were still having extensive dealings with Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi; each knew something of the other's involvement - Craig with emeralds, Sudbury with unwanted babies - but as they were both Pawpaw Old Boys (both had excelled in rugby, water polo, bullying, and geography), they felt bound by a

code of honour, a kind of latter-day *virtus*, to pretend that they knew nothing of each other's involvement; so there was a tacit understanding between them not to mention their mutual partner.

They still talked of money. After all, illicit emerald buying wasn't Craig Wick's only source of income; and 'helping women in distress' wasn't Sudbury Bauls's only source of income. (The fact that these two sources of income were inextricably linked needn't be an issue at this point in time.) For Christ's sake we're at a party aren't we? Let's enjoy ourselves for a change. Let's swap anecdotes about Daylene of *Bodylines*, for example. After all, we've both screwed the bitch.

"Let me get you another Scotch, Suddo."

"Thanks Craigs. Make it a Rhodesian t(w)ot."

They gave each other a knowing wink, the same kind of wink they gave each other when Daylene sauntered by in her designer tracksuit. Fuck it, but life was good.

Before moving on to another scenario on this beautiful New Year's Day of 1992, let us return briefly to Bulawayo's triathlon hope, Tracey-Lay Cock, who is about to be spiritually visited. She much prefers these spiritual visitations to the physical ones her husband Boxer makes, usually on a Sunday afternoon, which have none of the slow, delicious build-up, the lovely, warm slipperiness, the: oh yes! oh yes! oh yes, yes, yes! of her visitations from the Holy Ghost, John the Baptist, and Samson. Look: (Not you, Absalom! Enza digga lo garden! Cheeky so and so!) Look: the spasm of ecstasy rippling through her designer track-suit; look: the closed eyes; the spittle dangling from the slack mouth; the hands involuntarily covering the breasts; the thighs, muscular with cycling and jogging, pressed tightly together. Is it the son of David, namesake of the Twot's chief gardener, he who killed Amnon? No. Is it the King of Babylon, namesake of the Twot's cook, he who conquered Jerusalem and took the Jews into exile? No. Then who? Who is spiritually visiting this athletic, rather stupid young member of Bulawayo's upper classes? I said I'd tell you, and I will. It's her best spiritual visitation yet, and she hopes he'll come again, in church. It's Kevin Costner. Now before you start to protest, let me remind you that Jesus looks a lot like whoever the current Hollywood heart-throb happens to be - at least in the eyes of those ladies who swell the congregation at The Blood of Jesus Temple. Last year he looked like Patrick Swayze; the year before he looked like Rob Lowe. In between these Hollywood heart-throbs, he tends to look a lot like Moral MacBraggert. Tracey-Lay had seen Kevin Costner in the

Robin Hood movie where his concern for the poor enhanced his similarity to Jesus. So it isn't really Kevin Costner who is paying her this spiritual visitation, is it? I mean!

Chapter Nine

The buck's fizz had run out but there was enough beer and wine, Ingeborg Ficker boasted, to float a battleship. And they'd made quite a dent in the ox. Ingeborg's labourers - sorry, guests - stood by with carving knives and long forks, ready to attend to the needs of the revellers, of whom Jealous Umbankwa's was the greatest. None of your slices for Jealous; he insisted on whopping bloody chunks of the stuff from any part of the carcass, which he would literally tear with his strong canines.

"You'll get a tummy ache if you don't chew your food," his friend Ravi Chunder warned. Ravi was nibbling on a thin slice of lean beef taken from that part of the ox that butchers call topside, and washing it down with Green Valley red wine, a bottle of which he kept upright between his legs for the purpose. Their friend, the renowned conversationalist Gymnogene Pigge, was sucking off bits of the very soft meat around the top of the ox's tail. When he got down to the little vertebrae he tossed them playfully at anyone who happened to be gyrating past. He and Jealous were drinking beer by the quart.

Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikheroti was sulking because some of the servants - sorry, guests - had made off with the head and the guts, Sobantu's favourite and second favourite portions. He had to content himself with a chunk from the aitch bone area, which was about as close as he could get, seeing Gymnogene had the tail, to the beast's tasty arse. He liked a lot of salt on his meat and he washed it down with the best South African wine. I can't give you the name of this wine because Ingeborg has discreetly removed its label.

Fark, Doss, Kathleen, Simon and Nicholas, and Ingeborg herself were vying for the fillet. Take it easy Fark, don't snatch, there's plenty for all. Porteous and Rigby favoured the rump, while Comrade Cheti and his friend, Beauty, attacked the prime ribs. By now there were many other guests at the party. A serial killer was gorging himself on bolo, a novelist wandered about with a piece of neck in one hand and a piece of shin in the other, a rogue politician was making heavy weather of the brisket, and an aid worker from Germany was round the side of the house vomiting the chunk she had swallowed too quickly.

And who's that with the fatty helping of sirloin, medium rare, swinging from his clenched teeth while he moves to the rhythm of *Ipi Tombi*, a bottle of beer in either hand, held high? It's Bulawayo's own playwright, Skies

Izindebe. Just look at him swing! He hasn't had such a good time since... was it his twelfth or his thirteenth overseas tour? Now his partner, Ms O'Toole-bag joins him. Their dance is a simulated fuck. Others join them, and soon there are dozens of couples at it - from the front, from the back, sideways, diagonally....

A public holiday it may have been, a swinging party there may have been, but Simon and Nicholas had work to do. It is said that there is no rest for the wicked, but there is even less rest for the committed Gallopskyite who feels that world revolution should not be delayed a minute longer. Did I say a minute? Make that a second. After gorging themselves on fillet steak dripping with bloody juice, the popular expats whose loathing for 'Rhodies' was neatly complimented by their love of 'black pussy', made a sign to each other and went to seek out their hostess. Ingeborg was on the verandah doing a simulated fuck with the serial killer who was digging bits of bolo gristle out of his teeth with a four inch hat pin. Someone had turned the *Ipi Tombi* record over.

"Ingeborg," said Simon, "we're ready to move."

Their sense of purpose was transferred immediately to the person who, while not quite as radical as the Gallopskyites - there was too much of the romantic in Ingeborg Ficker, too much sense of self - was pretty well committed to revolution, in whatever form it took. "Right," she said, "let's go."

She left her partner making pelvic thrusts at fresh air, a change for him from day-old corpses, and led the two Englishmen to the garage where a baker's dozen of babies, at least one of whom may still have been alive, were waiting to be dumped. Simon and Nicholas had brought them out from Bulawayo. It was the money earned from the mothers of these babies that had paid for Ingeborg Ficker's party, and that included the twelve crates of South African wine. "I only want twelve," she said to the ex-pats, "we can shove the thirteenth one down my domestic workers' Blair toilet. Leave it for now."

The babies were individually wrapped so they found three large grain sacks and put four in each sack. The remaining parcel was left on a wheelbarrow for the time being. "Follow me," said Ingeborg. She swung a sack over her shoulder and the men did the same. They followed her out of the garage, round the back of the house and into the bush. The music of *Ipi Tombi* grew fainter and fainter.

Two factors dominated the complex personality of Ingeborg Ficker:

these were Ingeborg the artist, and Ingeborg the moralist. Now she was about to merge these powerful impulses into an epiphany so strong, so charged, that it would provide the energy for many paintings, and many deeds of social concern, to come.

After tramping for what seemed like hours through dense bush in the hottest part of the day, lugging heavy weights which they continually shifted from shoulder to shoulder, the three comrades arrived at their destination: the site of the Old Gwanda Giantess. There were the two kopjes, the whaleback and the castle, which made up her breasts; and here was the eroded gully, bare of vegetation other than a few invasive cactuses and one or two scraggly snake apples. The outer labia were pocked with deserted anthills, the inner had bits of dead root sticking out of them. Between them, at the bottom of the gully, a barren sub-soil: granite sands; and it was here that they dumped the babies, twelve of them, one after the other. They thought they heard the seventh one cry, but it might have been a grey lourie: there were a number of them fossicking about on a buffalo thorn tree which grew out of the Giantess's navel. The Giantess's thighs, which were very wide apart, had already been outlined in a mixture of whitewash and white PVA. The artist had a long way to go, but there was no rush. Time stood still in Matabeleland. She must get her lab... sorry, friends who helped her out for the minimum wage, to re-fill those forty gallon drums so that she could continue, as soon as possible, with this most ambitious project of her life.

"I don't know about you but I'm fucking thirsty," said Nicholas.

"Me too," said his chum, Simon. "Let's get back. You coming, Ingeborg?"

"You two go on," said Ingeborg, "I need to be alone for a while."

"Right, see you later."

Ingeborg didn't reply. She had forgotten their very existence. After all, who were they? Mere nothings in the face of genius. They began to walk back to the party while the face of genius with its hard brown eyes and large, slack mouth took on that subcutaneous glow which only a mixture of ecstasy and heat fatigue can provide. She found herself a bit of shade under a cabbage tree and sat down. First the goose pimples came, then the shiver down the spine, then the constriction of the throat. Finally, as AE Housman so preciously puts it, there was a 'precipitation of water to the eyes'. In the epiphanic merging of her art with her assistance to mothers who were burdened with unwanted babies, Ingeborg Ficker had touched eternity.

Back at the party Simon and Nicholas were somewhat put out to see

their mutual ‘black pussy’ disappearing into one of the bedrooms with Sobantu ‘The Butcher’ Ikherothi. Still, it was against their convictions to stay huffed for long. After all, property is theft, and they certainly didn’t own Angelina whatsisname. They looked about them for a replacement: nothing available at the party, so they ventured into the kitchen where one of Ingeborg’s domestic workers - really more of a friend than a domestic worker - said she would help them out once she had done the dishes. In the meantime they went in search of a drink. Their throats were parched. As they passed through the kitchen into the dining room area they could not help but overhear Angelina moaning: “*Yebo-ke, yebo-ke, yebo-ke. Bantu bakithi, bantu bakithi, bantu bakithi. Depha, depha, depha.*” Old Sobantu certainly had a way with them.

The most Nicholas and Simon ever got out of Angelina were stifled yawns and a grunt or two.

Now, with the worst heat of the day over, the party began to liven up considerably. There was not much left of the ox but everyone seemed to be replete, and there was still plenty of booze. The *Ipi Tombi* record was turned over for the seventh time, and the guests - anybody who was anybody in Bulawayo was a guest at this party - the guests danced: with partners, without partners, and in groups. One of the more sedate groups was that comprised of the trinity: Ravi Chunder, Jealous Umbankwa, and Gymnogene Pigge. These friends, zonked out as they were with meat, dagga, and booze, were more disposed to finger clicking than pelvis thrusting; and it was this group that Simon and Nicholas joined until the dish washer, accompanied by two young girls, peasant girls from the farm compound, appeared and motioned to them to join her. They inspected the girls who must have been in their early teens, and chose one, the younger looking one; then they paid the dish washer a couple of dollars each, and led the girl away to the Datsun 120Y. The dish washer was surprised that they took only the one girl but then she was not to know that Simon Snott and Nicholas Pus-Bottom preferred it that way. The gift of sharing was an integral part of Gallopskyite ideology.

On their way to the Datsun 120Y they had to pass the Mercedes Benz with white number plates, wherein Comrade Habakuk Cheti and his tummy were making heavy weather of their Matabeleland North companion: Beauty Ruforwokuda-Jones. And on the other side of them, in the PABBB Range Rover, a joint investigation between the Republic of Ireland and the Republic of Zimbabwe was being carried on into the ups and downs, and the

ins and outs, of indigenous drama.

Meanwhile Fark Ruckles and his friend Doss, in conversation with another intellectual couple whom they had met for the first time at Ingeborg's New Year's Day party, were becoming very maudlin about their love child, Mpfinbahongonyi, whom they had left in the capable hands of their domestic worker's seven year old daughter. They kept thanking each other over and over again for the gift of the child, and weeping into each other's eyes, and saying how blessed they were.

"And you, Afghan," asked Fark wiping his tears with a half-eaten bread roll, "are you and... er... Litotes blessed with a child?" Not yet but they were trying. Unfortunately Litotes' copper T had got stuck halfway down her vagina and just wouldn't come out. Wreaked havoc with their sex life.

"We pity you, Doss and I, we really do. We are so, so fortunate to be blessed with little Mpfinbi, aren't we, my love?"

Doss was feeling so overcome with tenderness for her baby that she couldn't reply. She simply snuggled closer to Fark.

Litotes, a Scottish Social Scientist, who was doing her PhD on the role of nostrils in the transition from puberty to adulthood in left-handed Zimbabweans, wanted to know if Fark and Doss had only the one child.

"Yes, only the one," Fark replied; then he let out a terrible sigh and told them in a choking voice that there had been others, two others. They had lost both of them in very tragic circumstances.

"Care to talk about it?" said Afghan in a very kind voice. He was a psychologist from Australia doing research for a PhD on the correlation between intelligence and penis-size in bilharzia infected men who lived within a ten kilometre radius of the Mzingwane Dam.

"Oh, why should we burden you with our troubles?" Fark managed to say in-between his own sobs and Doss's who was releasing them against his neck so that they produced fart-like sounds.

"Because we really do care for you," said Afghan reassuringly. He was a baldhead with very bad dandruff and a peculiar body odour that made Fark think of a porcupine midden. He and Litotes were holding hands. "It doesn't take a psychologist to know that talking about a problem always helps."

It was Doss who spoke, calmer now, in her strong Dutch accent. "Our first voz a liddle poy. Ve call him Hans..."

Saying the boy's name proved too much for the sensitive Hollander who had come out to Zimbabwe for all the right reasons. Besides, she hadn't been able to get work in Holland where even the domestic workers had PhD's.

Fark took over. The half-eaten bread roll was now soaked in tears. While he spoke, he absent-mindedly sucked it. "Yes, we called him Hans: the sweetest little boy; looked just like his mother. Very advanced too. He was crawling at six months. That was the trouble."

"Go on."

Fark steadied his voice as well as he could, then he went on. "Yes, that was the trouble. Too advanced for his own good, poor little mite. We had to go to one of those all-night-and-the-next-day parties so we left Hans with our domestic worker's boy friend who drank all my Cognac and fell asleep. While..."

"Go on, Fark."

"I'm sorry. It's just that..."

"We know, Farky, we know," said Afghan squeezing Fark's knee and then Doss's shoulder. "We know how painful this is for the two of you but you must talk about it."

"Yes," agreed Litotes, "you must - poor darlings." Then she squeezed Fark's knee and Doss's shoulder. Then Fark squeezed Litotes' knee - the four were huddled together on the grass in the now late afternoon - and Afghan put his hand on Doss's knee, and left it there.

"As I was saying," sniffed Fark, "the bastard got drunk and fell asleep and didn't stop our poor little boy when he crawled... when he crawled into the swimming pool and drowned."

"Oh how awful for you," said Litotes. She put her hand on Fark's thigh, and left it there. "And the other one?"

"De udder von vos very blawnt."

"Yes," agreed Fark, "Winnipeg was very blonde."

"Winnipeg," repeated Litotes, "what a lovely name for a boy!"

"Vinnipek vos a girl."

"Oh, a girl? Oh, I see. Well it's a lovely name for a boy or a girl. Don't you agree, Afghan?"

"Yes I do. I'm all for unisex names. Far too much sex-role stereotyping in our culture." After this pronouncement Afghan pushed down on Doss's knee for a few seconds, then he took his hand away, slowly, so that the last of his fingers to leave tickled Doss down to the shin. "Go on, Fark," he said.

Fark was further encouraged by the gentle pressure that was, by degrees, moving up his thigh. "Winnipeg's birth helped ease the pain of Little Hans's passing away - but not for long, no, not for long. When she was just three weeks old, we had to go to a party - a friend of ours, one of my countrymen,

had just been awarded his PhD (*Magni cum laude*) from the Martin Luther King University in Moscow... what was his research, Doss?... something revolving around clitorectomies... anyway we had to go to this party to celebrate with him and we left the baby with our neighbour's dog, Rottie, who was supposed to have a wonderful way with children... Oh God!"

"Go on, you poor things, go on." Afghan returned his hand to Doss's knee and then pressed it slowly up her thigh. Litotes' exploratory index finger made its first contact with something - she couldn't be certain through all that cloth - something she thought might be genital. Fark's left ball, perhaps. At any rate, it was very warm and very soft.

"The dog ate her."

"Oh no!"

"How terrible!"

"Ghastly!"

For a while they shook their heads and clicked their tongues and patted each other. Then Afghan said, "Let's find somewhere a little more secluded, shall we?"

"The Range Rover," Fark suggested. But the Range Rover, as we know, was occupied. The Republic of Ireland and the Republic of Zimbabwe were working on the climax of their new indigenous drama. So the four friends wandered into the house as if to find something more to drink, turned down the passage, found a vacant bedroom, and proceeded to fuck in quadruplicate. In the days that followed, days which quickly turned to weeks, and then months, and then years, those friends of Ingeborg Ficker's who cleaned and tidied the house, were unable to fathom an odour - something like the midden of a small animal - which pervaded one of the bedrooms. Their inability to identify the stink may be excused because, as far as I know, you don't get wallabies in Zimbabwe.

The party raved on. Guests came and went. Some youngsters, Rhodie rucker-bugger types, from one of the private schools, no doubt, tried to gate-crash, but Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi, who had completed his business with Angelina, soon changed their minds. It was New York Twot and friends, in between raves. New York was driving the Toyota 2,4 diesel, LWB, aircon, radio/tape, blue, delivery mileage, which his parents had bought him for his eighteenth birthday. Sobantu's AK47 was enough to send them packing.

Chapter Ten

Elizabeth woke to the good smell of bacon sizzling. She was alone in the tent. Both her parents were early risers - even on holiday. She yawned and stretched herself; then she reached for her Bible and found the twenty third psalm. She read it aloud, quietly, to herself. Her early morning voice was a little raspy, but sweet. When she had read it through, she closed her Bible, and her eyes, and recited the beautiful verses. Her father interrupted her at 'my cup runneth over' with a cup of strong tea.

"Careful you don't spill it Elizabeth, it's very full."

"I won't, Dad. Thanks." She took a sip and said. "That's better. Where's Mom?"

"Where do you think?"

"Looking for seeds?"

"Looking for seeds. Would you like your breakfast in bed?"

"Yes please, Dad. Hey! What's the catch?"

"What do you mean: 'what's the catch'?"

"Why the five-star treatment all of a sudden? What do you want from me?" Her tone was playful.

He replied, seriously: "I want you to stop being miserable, Elizabeth. I can't bear to see you so unhappy."

"But Dad, I'm not miserable; I'm not unhappy; not right now, anyway."

"But last night..."

"Last night is over, Dad. Yes, last night... Quick, Dad, the bacon's burning!"

He went to save the bacon. He flipped the rashers onto a clean enamel plate then he broke eggs into the pan. He wouldn't do Philippa's yet. "How do you want your egg?" he called to his daughter.

"Turned over, please, Dad; not too soft. Is there any tomato?"

"Yes. I'll do some after the eggs. Speaking of eggs - how's my Asil Kahn?"

"Fine." She stuck her head out of the tent in order to continue their interrupted conversation. "Unhappiness is really just a part of happiness, you know, Dad."

"Is it?"

"Yes. William Blake says 'without contraries is no progression'."

Phillip took his egg out of the pan, sunny side up, and turned Elizabeth's over. Then he started to slice a tomato. "Is he one of your teachers?"

“Blake?” Elizabeth smiled: “No Dad, he’s a poet; he died in 1827. It’s the necessity of opposites, you know.”

Phillip took his only child’s egg out of the pan, gently so that the yolk wouldn’t break, and placed it on a clean enamel plate. “I’m just doing the tomatoes, then your breakfast will be ready,” he said.

“Thanks Dad. I’m as hungry as a horse.”

“Would you like a slice of bread too?”

“Yes, if you fry it.”

“Ok, I’ll put it in after the tomatoes. I hope all this fat isn’t going to make you sick, Elizabeth?”

He did the tomato slices quickly, then he fried the bread. He brought Elizabeth’s plate to her in the tent. He fetched her a knife and fork, and the salt and the pepper. He watched her tucking in for a while, then he fetched his own plate and sat next to her, on the ground, just outside the tent.

“This is delicious, Dad,” said Elizabeth with a mouth full of egg and bacon. She beamed at him. “I’m happy.”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full. There’s Mom. Watch my plate.” He put the pan back on the grate and broke an egg into it. “How do you want your egg, love?” he called to his wife.

“As it comes, love,” she said. “I’ve got some *Commiphora mollis* and a few *Albizia tanganyicensis*, would you believe?” She put down her plastic bag of seeds and went over to inspect her egg.

When it was cooked, Phillip put it on a plate for her. “Bacon?” he said.

“Yes please.”

“Tomato?”

“Yes please. Is there any more tea?”

“Plenty. Pass me your cup.”

Phillip handed Philippa her plate of breakfast and a knife and fork. “Salt and pepper’s in the tent with Elizabeth,” he said. “I’ll bring the tea.”

“Thanks, love,” his wife replied. “And would you mind bringing me a slice of bread? You know how peckish camping out makes me.”

“Don’t I, indeed?” he said with a lascivious wink, reminding her of the ‘quickie’ they had had in the tent the night before, while Elizabeth had been out moping at the moon.

She sat down outside the tent, a little red-faced, next to her husband’s half-eaten breakfast. “Shame, love,” she said, “I didn’t realise you were still busy eating. Your food will be cold. Leave the tea for now and come and finish it.”

He brought her tea, and a fresh cup for himself. "It's all right," he said. "I don't mind it cold once in a while. Here. Careful, it's hot."

She took her tea and thanked him, then she asked Elizabeth for the salt and pepper. When the girl stuck her head through the flap she said, "Well, if it isn't Sleeping Beauty! Dad says you were up half the night."

"Hi, Mom. Dad exaggerates. I went out for an hour or so. I always feel much closer to the world at night, and it was such a beautiful night. I kind've lost sense of myself, I..."

"You had a religious experience," said her mother crunching on a piece of bacon rind.

"I suppose it was," replied Elizabeth. Then she blushed and added: "Although my thoughts seemed to be more profane than sacred."

"Is there a difference?"

"Of course there's a difference, Mom. How can you..."

"You're the one who's always going on about the necessity of opposites, Elizabeth. If you are prepared to say that there is no joy without misery, no light without darkness, surely you should be prepared to say that there is no sacred without the profane."

"Well..."

"That's the nature of religion. Have you read that book I gave you, the one by Mircea Eliade?"

"I started to, Mom, but it's difficult. He uses words that I've never heard of before, like 'valorise', for goodness' sake. What does that mean?"

"Haven't you got a dictionary, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, I have, but..."

"Use it."

Phillip Fawkes drained his tea, picked up his empty plate and stood up. "I'm going to throw in a line before we break camp," he said, "see you later."

"All right then Mom," said Elizabeth getting a little heated, "you tell me what 'valorise' means."

"Well, literally, it means... er... when a government, you know, artificially raises the price of a commodity. Or fixes it. I can't remember how Eliade uses it. You'll have to show me the context when we get home. But to get back to your experience last night: it's the New Year, and the New Year is a very significant time, not only for Christians but for all mankind. Eliade has a lot to say about New Year's rituals, you know." Elizabeth did not speak, so she went on, first disposing of a piece of bread which she had run

round her plate in order to soak up the juice. “The New Year is an earthly imitation of the first day of Creation with a big ‘C’...” Elizabeth sighed and lay back with a tight mouth. Here we go again.

“...on earth joins sacred time which is eternal ... vestige of those saturnalia which symbolized the moral chaos of the Old Year.... With each New Year man is reborn... reintegrated with the Dream Time... sacred and profane...”

“Elizabeth, are you listening to me?”

“Yes Mom, but I don’t understand a word you’re saying.”

“What I’m trying to tell you Elizabeth, is that last night you were present at the creation of the world.”

“Yes Mom, if you say so. Last night I was present at the creation of the world.”

“Don’t be facetious, young lady.”

“Well how do you expect me to respond when you talk way above my head. Excuse me please, I need to go to the loo. I think I’m coming on.”

Philippa Fawkes made way for her daughter. “Don’t forget to take paper. They don’t seem to provide it any more.”

“Where’s the wet-pack, Mom?”

“It’s in the top of the hold-all. Make sure you put the soap back in its little dish. I’ll wash the breakfast things. And Elizabeth...”

“What?” She was already on her way to the ablution block.

“I wouldn’t go barefoot if I were you; there are lots of thorns on the ground.”

Elizabeth ignored her mother. Ten steps later, she let out a gasp of pain. She had stood on a stud thorn. In order to pull it out she sat down - on another stud thorn. Her mother came to her rescue. She didn’t say “I told you so”, she said: “That’s *Dicerocaryum zanguebarium*. Isn’t it a lovely name? It belongs to the family *Pedaliaceae*. Now you wait here, don’t move, they’re all around you, and I’ll fetch your tackies.”

“You know, Mom, come to think of it, it was a bit like that.” Her mother was squatting beside her, dusting her feet before slipping on the tackies.

“What was?” she replied.

“Last night, when I was lying on that rock and looking up at the moon. It was a bit like being present at the Creation.”

“That’s the trouble with you Christians, Elizabeth, you can’t divest yourselves of the metaphor. For you it’s always ‘like this’ or ‘like that’. A pagan wouldn’t have said ‘It was like being present at the Creation’; she

would have said ‘It is being present at the Creation’.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t quite understand you, Mom,” said Elizabeth standing up and dusting off the seat of her pants. “You don’t know how to talk down to people.”

“Speak to your English teacher when you get back to school. Boland Lipp is an authority on primitive mythology. He’ll be able to make it clear to you. It might be an idea to take a good shower while we’re here, love. Remember we’re going back to stringent water rationing.”

“Good idea, Mom. I need a shower, anyway.”

“And, Elizabeth: on your way back please collect me a couple of monkey oranges - *Strychnos spinosa* - you’ll see them lying on the ground, loads of them, on the left hand side of the path.”

“Right, Mom.”

“Choose nice, healthy yellow ones, see?”

“Right, Mom.”

Elizabeth went on to the ablution block where the friendly warden greeted her, and Philippa returned to the campsite where she proceeded to collect all the dirty plates, cups, cutlery, and cooking utensils in order to wash them. Her husband was fishing from Elizabeth’s rock. “Any luck?” she called.

“Not yet, but I’ve got a good bite. I mustn’t talk.”

While Elizabeth showered she left the egg in the cup of her clean bra.

Afterwards, while she was drying her hair in the sun, the warden approached her with a rusty old jam tin and asked her if she had any fishing worms to spare. She said she would ask her father. On the way back to the camp, she remembered the monkey oranges and she selected two healthy ripe fruits from the dozens that lay on the ground under the *Strychnos* trees. She remembered reading that a child from the Masvingo district had died eating a green monkey orange. The unripe fruit was full of strychnine. As she walked, the fruits, with their hard shells, clicked musically together. She went through the nest of stud thorns, this time safely in her tackies. She noticed with surprise that the prostrate plant of the stud thorn sported a very pretty flower. Bit like a foxglove, really. Or a jacaranda. There it is again: the necessity of opposites: beautiful, delicate flower produces vicious, ugly thorn. Ho hum.

As she approached the camp, she saw her father fishing very intently from the rock - my rock - Jet. Her mother was round the back of the ablution centre washing the breakfast things. Elizabeth’s hair was drying quickly in

the already hot sun. There was hardly a breath of air. Even the topmost leaves of the wild fig, under which their tent sheltered, were still. It felt good to be alive... and yet... who said the heart was the seat of the affections? It's right there in the pit of your stomach, that gnawing feeling. With nervousness it's butterflies, but with love - damn profane love - it's a rat.

"Dad!"

"Shh! I've got a bite."

"Have you got any spare worms?"

"Shh!"

She watched him strike, then frantically reel in. The rod was bent almost double. The fish came to the surface, flapping the lilies into disarray. "Wow, Dad, it's a big one!" said Elizabeth. She dropped the things she was carrying and joined him on the rock.

"It's a big one all right." Her father was breathing excitedly. "Just hope it doesn't get snagged in the reeds. Or swim under a rock. Bass do that."

"Is it a bass?"

"I think so. Yes it is. Look at that." The fish had jumped right out of the water. Suddenly the line went slack. The rod straightened. "Oh no. I think I've lost it." He flicked the rod this way and that. There was no resistance. "It's gone." Despondently Phillip reeled in his line. There was no hook or sinker at the end. "Damn!"

"Shame, Dad," said Elizabeth giving him a pat on the shoulder. "Well, at least you've got a witness to the one that got away. I saw it all right. It was a beauty."

"All of three pounds, I reckon. Would have made good eating. Damn." He began packing up his fishing tackle.

"Dad, the warden asked me if we had any worms to spare."

"Sure. He can have what's left." He passed his tin of worms to Elizabeth.

"Thanks Dad," she said, "I'll take them to him now, then we can start loading the car."

"Yes. I suppose it's time we started heading home. Hope those kids have been feeding the animals."

"Don't worry. They can be trusted."

She climbed down the rock with the worms and went to look for the warden. Her mother passed with a dish full of sparkling clean utensils. "Where are you off to?" she said to her daughter, "we must pack up now."

"I'll be right back, Mom," Elizabeth replied, "I'm just going to give

these worms to the warden. I got you your monkey oranges. Dad has just lost a lovely big bass; he needs comforting.” She started to run but then she remembered the egg in her bra. She walked towards the warden who was chopping wood somewhere behind the chip geyser that had provided Elizabeth with what would turn out to be her last shower in many months to come.

Chapter Eleven

Nobody is denying that there was a strong streak of prurience in Boland Lipp. He indulged in lewd ideas, especially in bed, once he had turned off his reading light. Don't be surprised, if ever you get the opportunity to look through his bookshelves, when you find there copies of shockers such as *The Story of O*, *The Perfumed Garden*, and *Fanny Hill*, not to mention the complete writings of the Marquis de Sade. Origin of the word 'sadistic'. Wonder if sadism was any different before Donatien Alphonse Francois gave it a name? But then, what's in a name? What's in a word? And the word was made flesh. Religion is like art in that they both perform the function of rendering experience - immediate experience. The word 'flesh' becomes the thing 'flesh'. Does the Communion wine turn into Christ's blood once it has passed the lips of the believer? Or does it remain a figure of speech: as if the wine were Christ's blood? What do they call it? Trans... something. Better check that.

With some reluctance Boland climbed out of bed and groped his way to the living room in order to find his dictionary. "Trans... trans... trans..." he muttered to himself. Before he'd located the T's, the word came to him: 'Transubstantiation'. Of course. He was about to return to his bedroom, to the comfort and security of his leaf-green duvet, when his good ear picked up sounds of Education with Production coming from next door. He got down on his knees and crawled over to the wall plug that connected his living room to his neighbours' bedroom. Carefully he placed his good ear against the three little holes, and listened. What he heard was the rhythmic grunting of a man, each grunt very quickly followed by the sound of heavy flesh walloping light flesh. There was a third sound, barely perceptible through the plug holes, and that was the sound of whimpering... a young girl.

Boland's breath began to come quickly. That fortunate young apprentice Fitter and Turner, Hoagy, was at it again; at it with which (and how many?) of his Form Three C girls? His good angel said, "Boland, you must report this to the headmaster. Think of the reputation of Black Rhino High." His bad angel said, "Balls! Leave the kids alone. Stuff the school, Boland." As usual his bad angel prevailed. He listened with mounting excitement to the goings on next door. He wondered which of the Three C girls, apart from Candle, were involved. In his mind's eye, he began to call them up in alphabetical order: Anys, Storm-Lee (brown hair, snub-nosed, sulky, overweight); Arsel, Tornado Jane (brown hair, freckles, sulky, good legs);

Bottem, America (blonde hair, pimples, very sulky, smelly); Cukka, Tami River (curly brown hair, possibly 'coloured', cheerful, sex...) now now Boland, that will do. Keep it clean. Remember you are in a position of trust.

Let us leave Mr Lipp to his imaginary parade of school girls, some in uniform, some - the ones with better figures - in swimming costumes, and one or two - Boland, shame on you! - one or two, let's face it, the sexier ones, stark naked. Let us leave him on all fours in his green striped shorty pyjamas, with his good ear glued to the wall plug, and, by the magical power of words, let us slip through the wall - after all, it is only a single brick thick - and let us observe with our own eyes some Education with Production.

The Wicks' apartment is sparsely furnished. Why bother when it is used only for the occasional weekend? The dominant feature in the kitchen is the eleven cubic foot fridge, which is full of beer, wine, and soft drinks. The dominant feature of the living room is a vast oaken liquor cabinet, which is full of imported whisky, brandy, and port. There is a shelf above the liquor stuffed with imported snacks like pretzels, olives, roasted almonds, and, somewhat anti-climactically, Niknaks. Reading matter in this apartment is rare, but if you are so disposed, you'll find some *Reader's Digests* in the lavatory, and some *Scopes* in the bedroom. Apart from the *Scopes* and a large framed print of Tretchikof's *The Weeping Rose*, the only moveable item in the bedroom - human bodies excluded in this inventory - is a king-size bed with built in headboard, side tables, and reading lamps. Mr Wick had long since removed, from the ceiling above the bed, the full length mirror because it had prompted too many questions from his children.

Well, speak of the devil! You're wrong, Boland, the grunting walloper is not young Hoagy Van Worsmasjen: it's himself: Craig Wick. And he hasn't even bothered to take his clothes off! Sorry, Boland, you're wrong again: the whimpering girl being well and truly walloped is not one of your Three C's, it is Godknows Ilithanga from Number Three. You thought she was going home to wash the dishes when she left you earlier this New Year's Eve. She deceived you, Boland, but don't be hard on her (you wouldn't anyway, you old softy), she is not being pounded by that massive bum and those vast front-row thighs out of choice. "You be there, picannin!" Baas Wick had told her after their last session, the weekend before, "or I'll have you jailed for soliciting." The sessions had stopped for a few months when Craig discovered that the child was pregnant. I can't tell you how revolted he was. Not surprised, mind you. The way these people breed. Like fucking flies. No wonder they can't feed themselves. No wonder the country's heading for

economic ruin. No wonder there's so much AIDS about. Fucksake! Poor Mr Wick: he wasn't to know - it was the girl's terrible secret - that the baby she had given birth to in the sanctuary of Number Five, and which would end up along with eleven others in an eroded gully somewhere off the Old Gwanda Road, was his.

We slipped through the wall just in time to witness the last few, the orgasmic wallops of the millionaire farmer from the south-western districts - father of Doberman and Candle, and - but this is another secret so please don't tell anyone - eleven year old Aubrey Twot. When it's over, he straightens up - he'd done it by pulling her to the bottom of the bed and leaning over her, legs on the floor, extended arms (nearly as long as his legs) straddling her on the bed, supporting his weight - he straightens up, slips his sopping willy back into his American boxer shorts, pulls up his trousers, and tucks in his shirt. Godknows closes her legs and rolls off the bed to find her clothes, which are on the floor where Baas Wick ripped them off. Ever since the baby, sex is very painful for her. Craig rummages in his pocket and pulls out a dollar coin, which he tosses at the child. She thanks him. He says "Now get out, and don't come back again, ever. This is the last time. Go on. Hambal!" He goes to find a mirror in the bathroom so that he can straighten his tie and comb his hair. He, Beryl and the kids had been invited to a New Year's Eve party at the Cocks. The family were already there; he mustn't be too late. He'd gone to the apartment on his own ostensibly to fetch a couple of bottles of hooch for the party. He mustn't forget those. He hears the girl leave the apartment and he heaves a sigh of relief. Well that's it. No more. Overs-kadovers. But that's what he says every time. She'll be back.

The show seemed to be over for Boland. The sounds of Education with Production had ceased. He got up off the floor feeling embarrassed for himself, even though he was entirely alone. He was not proud of his prurient behaviour. He went to the kitchen to fetch himself a glass of milk, and on the way back to his bedroom he suddenly became aware of some very interesting sounds coming from above: Number Six. His well tuned ear - the good one - picked out, among other sounds, the rhythmic squeaking of bed or couch springs, the rhythmic scraping on the floor of bed or couch legs, and the not quite so rhythmic shrieking of Afrodite Fawkes.

"It's murder!" said Boland aloud. God knows she deserves it, he thought, but I must help. He swallowed his milk, pulled on a pair of long trousers, grabbed his heaviest coat hanger, and dashed upstairs to the rescue. The door was closed but unlocked, so he stormed in brandishing the coat

hanger on high. What was his surprise when he came upon his headmaster playing, as he put it later on to himself, the double-backed monster with the sherry swilling Afrodite Jewl Fawkes, aunt by marriage of Boland's very favourite pupil, Elizabeth?

Boland backed out quickly - the lovers had been too engrossed to notice him - but not before he had taken in several details of the amazing scene. Rudolph's powder-blue safari suit, for instance, the pair with long trousers, which he wore to formal occasions like Rotary luncheons, was lying neatly folded on the glass topped coffee table. Next to it on the floor were his shoes, his Meridians and his socks. Next to these were three bottles of cooking sherry, two empty and one almost empty. Interesting composition for a still life in oils, Boland had briefly thought. Mrs Fawkes's garments, a sherry stained dressing gown and a rope belt, were strewn over the back of the couch. On the couch itself, and this was the scene that remained the most focussed in Boland's mind's eye as he stumbled back to his own apartment, were his septuagenarian headmaster, as naked as the day he was born, and his somewhat younger neighbour, as naked as the day she was born, playing a frantic game of 'hide the sausage'. Whether Afrodite's shrieks were of pleasure or pain or both is impossible to say. How would you respond to a very long, very hairy, very knuckly finger with a dirty half-inch nail up your bum; and, simultaneously, a thwopping jaloga bowling in-swing after in-swing, maiden overs? I mean, how would you?

Boland got downstairs just in time to see Candle's father, looking grim-faced, walking away from Number Two. Poor Hoagy, he thought to himself, bet he got the thrashing of his life. He put away the coat hanger, took off his trousers, and climbed into bed. But he couldn't get to sleep. His head was swimming with images that would have made good illustrations for a glossy edition of the Book of Revelations. He lay in bed for a few more minutes half listening to the commotion upstairs, then he decided to get up, get dressed and go for a walk. After all, it was New Year's Eve, and it was his fiftieth birthday.

He walked a little way from Cornwall Crescent, along Lend Street, then he turned to look at the apartment block. The lights were off in Numbers Two and Five. Number Three was a blaze of light and a blare of local pop music. People were coming and going, not only through the front door, but through the windows as well. The party had spilled over into the mango and lime trees of the grounds where there was at least one fight going on. He tried to locate Godknows in the crowd but he was too far away. He noticed a

lot of battered police vehicles parked in the vicinity of Cornwall Crescent. Must have heard that old cow shrieking. He caught sight of Mr Reebok leaning over the balcony outside Number Four. Wonder if they've heard the news of their grandchildren. What a bunch of losers. Like me. Boland swallowed a surge of self pity, crossed the road and ventured into the vacant lot which was dimly lit by the street lights. It must have been close to midnight. In a moment car hooters and fire crackers would deafen Boland's good ear. He walked fairly aimlessly in the direction of the river. Every time he came to a tree, most of them exotics, he would give it an affectionate pat. He began to hum the song 'Trees': he had a recording of it by Paul Robeson. The song brought tears to his eyes. "This will never do, you old goat," he said aloud. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand - it smelt faintly of soap - then he said, "Think of something practical." So he forced himself to think of the exercise books in the back of his car. Holiday marking. The week before he'd fetched the piles of books from the school staffroom. He'd noticed a number of cars parked in the grounds, not teachers' cars because they were Mercs and Porsches and Toyota twin-cab trucks with quadraphonic tape decks and roll bars. Must have been a Board meeting.

It was. An extraordinary Board meeting called at short notice to decide upon the fate of a middle-aged English teacher of questionable morality called Boland Lipp. The headmaster wasn't there. The Board consulted him only on trivial matters like the curriculum. When it came to the issue of a member of staff whose attitude was regarded by many parents and fellow teachers, and the whole of the Board, to be a bad one for the boys and girls of Black Rhino High, the headmaster was politely but firmly told to get lost.

The Chairman, Sudbury Bauls, had opened the proceedings by "moving" that "our friend, Mr Lipp" be told in no uncertain terms that his services would not be required in the new year. His wife, Matilda, who was Secretary, seconded him. A volley of voices, the loudest coming from Deputy Chairman, Brother Moral MacBraggert, thirded him. Strontium Twot, Treasurer, suggested they make a list of grievances against him so that the Secretary could use them to help her draft a letter of dismissal. The grievances came thick and fast: he was effeminate, he was not a Christian, he was communistic, he discouraged competitiveness, he discussed sex, politics, and religion in class, he kept running down the... er... more wealthy members of society (which included most of the Black Rhino High parents, and all the Board.) I mean, where would this place (the school? the city? the country? the world?) be without us? Matilda Bauls went even further. She

wondered if Mr Lipp wasn't a Satanist. Murmurs of agreement, but perhaps we won't put that down in writing, not yet anyway.

"I don't see why not," said Matilda who was wearing a bright orange mini-skirt to match her deeply tanned legs, face and arms - and a large gold crucifix around her neck. "Do you know what he told Lace's class last year? He told them that all religions worshipped the same God."

"He what?"

"He did?"

"This boy must go.

"I think you're right, Matilda," said Brother MacBraggert. "I think Lipp is a child of the devil, and the sooner we get rid of him, the better."

"So, we dump him then?"

"We dump him. Next thing we know he'll be having... er... sex with one of the boys..."

"If he hasn't already. You know my son was telling me that that Bunion boy..."

"Nasty piece of work."

"...going on about the suffering poor..."

"I mean, whose fault is it, anyway?"

"That's just it. He tells the children that we're all responsible!"

"I mean, can you believe it?"

"Makes fun of the rugby team!"

"...could have knocked me down with a feather."

"And you know me, I'm not easily shocked."

"Yes. Young New York was telling me. Says that the majority of men in this country see women either as... er...virgins or...er...whores. Isn't it disgusting?"

"They say he wears perfume."

"...holes in his ear lobe."

"Which one?"

"Left, I think."

"Proves he's a homo."

"Did you hear that air fares are going up again?"

"No!"

"It's true. We might not be able to make it to Europe this year. The kids will be so disappointed, especially Lace because she hasn't been over as often as the other two. Ah, here's the tea. I'll be mommy. Tea, everyone?"

Thus the Black Rhino High School Board. Mr Khuluphala, the token

black member, said nothing but indicated his support by nodding and shaking his head at appropriate moments. For instance, when somebody said “So we dump him then?” he nodded his head, and when somebody said “They say he wears perfume,” he shook his head - rather sadly. He knew he was simply a token member but he didn’t care. He cared about nothing except money and the pleasures it could bring him. And in this company money was easy to come by. Loads of it.

So, while Boland was lugging text books from the staffroom to the boot of his car, the Board was deciding his fate. Matilda Bauls took great care over the drafting of the letter, checking almost every word to see if it was spelled correctly. Then she typed it herself. Boland won’t be receiving the letter during the course of this book so we shall be spared his profound disappointment, but we can at least anticipate his reaction to the smell of the envelope. Business or private, Matilda Bauls felt compelled to let linger her scents on envelopes and good quality writing paper. Would the sensitive English teacher detect, lurking below a bloom of Memoir Cherie, the stench of civet? Actually Mrs Bauls wrote two letters that day: one, as we know, Mr Lipp’s dismissal, and the other, her best friend’s appointment. Yes, at last it was happening: she could get rid of the hated Mr Lipp, and appoint in his place - her subjects were History and Afrikaans, but that did not matter - her dear friend Doosie Ripples. Doosie was a devout Born Again Christian who had almost single-handedly, her children and servants believed, toppled the Soviet Union. She was a famous campaigner in Matabeleland against pop music and animated cartoons - and anything else that was inspired by the devil. Another of her hobby-horses was pacifism, which, she believed, was eating away at the heart of the Christian (i.e. Born Again) establishment. She was particularly virulent in her denunciation of songs like ‘Where have all the flowers gone?’ which, she claimed, were communist inspired. Matilda loved and admired her. She would be such an influence for moral good in the school, particularly in the English department, which tended to attract anarchists like Lipp. Furthermore, Doosie (néé Vokdit) Ripples was married to one of the richest men in Zimbabwe. John ‘The Ripper’ Ripples owned half a dozen gold mines, half a dozen factories, and half a dozen ranches. Black Rhino High could only benefit.

Parps, bangs, and distant cheering heralded the coming-in of the New Year. Boland barely noticed the commotion because his full attention was drawn to the furtive activity of a man who was trying to stuff something into a broken sewage pipe. It was down by the river. Boland, screened behind a

beefwood tree, wondered if the man was hiding stolen goods. Anyway he was not going to find out. The man might be dangerous. Whatever he'd stolen had been wrapped in newspaper and carried in a plastic bag. He waited until the man hurried off in a southerly direction, then he ventured from behind the tree and continued his walk about the vacant lot. He was approaching one of the car wrecks when, to his surprise, he saw yet another suspicious looking man with a suspicious looking parcel under one arm. With his other arm he was trying to open the boot of the wreck. Boland immediately went to ground and crawled behind a lantana bush taking care not to come into any contact with the filthy litter that was lying around. He couldn't help noticing at least one used condom behind that bush. It looked orange in the faint light. He shuddered. He loathed the colour orange.

Boland noticed that this man was wearing a rather smart jacket, a Harris Tweed if he was not mistaken, the elbows reinforced with leather. His trousers were scruffy by contrast: a tattered pair of jeans. The boot would not open so the man pushed the parcel underneath the wreck. Then he stood up, Boland couldn't make out his features, and walked off in a southerly direction. Boland was sorely tempted to investigate the parcel but he decided not to. He felt a sneaking sympathy for petty thieves, and that is surely what these men were. That's what you think, Boland baby, that's what you think!

Boland then stood up and looked about him. The sounds of revelry in the nearby flats and houses, and at least one club, seemed to enhance the silence of the vacant lot. It was rather a beautiful night, still and starry. He crushed a leaf of the lantana and sniffed deeply. He liked its pungently sweet smell. It reminded him, somehow, of his childhood. He remembered how he and his brothers and sisters used to gorge themselves on the tiny black berry clusters. Cherry pie, they called it. Yet it's a noxious weed. Gay (Philippa Fawkes) would know more about it. Remember her campaign to clear it from the Hillside nature reserve. Not much support. Dammitall, I quite like the stuff. Bit of greenery at least. Gay had told him about a cow on her grandparents' small holding outside Bulawayo that had aborted its calf after eating *Lantana camara*. Its muzzle and its teats had been severely affected: cracking and peeling and suppurating; its eye and vaginal membranes had turned yellow with jaundice. Her grandfather had saved the cow's life by keeping it in the shade and putting carron oil over its sores. Boland remembered having looked up this word shortly after Gay had told him the story. It wasn't in his *Concise*. Had Gay made it up? No: he'd found it in the school's *Shorter*: the name derived from some ironworks in England. It's a mixture in equal parts

of linseed oil and lime water. Well, the fruit didn't seem to be poisonous. Boland had eaten enough of it as a child.

He strolled past the wreck with its suspicious package without so much as a second look and turned towards another wreck. These motor car shells, there were three of them in the lot, were popular hidey-holes for children during the day and adults during the night. This second wreck was in much better condition than the first. It was identifiably a Vauxhall Velox. He went right up to it, the better to inspect what was left of its bottle-green duco. As he stretched out his hand to touch the cracking paint he noticed that the shell was occupied by two people either about to begin, or to conclude, a New Year ritual. Boland understood why there was an increase in sordid behaviour, usually of an erotic nature, on the last night of the Old Year. The beginning of the New Year was also the beginning of a New World, a new space as well as a new time. These saturnalia where people indulged their appetites regardless of rules, laws, mores, symbolized the death of the corrupt Old Year, the corrupt Old World. How did Eliade put it? 'By symbolically participating in the annihilation and re-creation of the world, man too was created anew; he was reborn, for he began a new life.' Hoagy and the girls from Three C, Mr McMackmack and Mrs Fawkes, this couple here, himself with his heightened prurience, revellers all over Matabeleland, were transforming recreation into re-creation.

"Evening Sir," said a sheepish Jet Bunion as he climbed out of the wreck with a girl Boland recognized but could not put a name to. Not one of his pupils. She looked away and said nothing. She was fumbling with her bra strap.

Boland was deeply embarrassed. "Hullo, Jettatura," he replied. "...er... happy New Year." He held out his hand.

Reluctantly Jet took it. His hand, Boland felt, was covered in a sticky substance. "Happy New Year. Sir."

The girl said nothing. She had walked on a little way. "Er... we're off to a party," said Jet, trying to ease the tension with talk. "Do you know the Cocks, Sir? Boxer and Tracey-Lay. She's my cousin. We just wanted to miss all that Auld Lang Syne stuff. All that kissing, you know."

"Yes I know Jet. Listen, I'm sorry, I..."

"No. I'm sorry. I..."

"I didn't mean... I was just going for a walk. Couldn't sleep. Enjoy yourselves at the party. See you next term."

"Sure, Sir. Good night."

“Good morning.”

“Of course. Bye.”

They walked off in opposite directions. Boland felt this powerful impulse to weep, and indeed his eyes were brimming with tears. He decided to return to his apartment. The rhythm of his steps agitated into his head the words: ‘poems are made by fools like me/but only God can make a tree’... over and over again. Around him he was dimly aware of stealthy figures carrying parcels wrapped in newspaper and stuffed into plastic bags. The souls of the dead, perhaps, returning to participate in the destruction of the Old World.

Chapter Twelve

Anybody who was (or was about to become) anybody in Bulawayo and surrounding districts was present at the Old Year's Night party thrown by the desirable Cocks. They were very proud of their home in the Eastern Suburbs, which they'd bought in the early eighties for seven thousand dollars and which was now insured for half a million dollars. True, they'd upgraded the property considerably over the years. They'd taken out all the indigenous trees and put in a swimming pool and a sauna. They'd cut down the hibiscus hedge and put up a seven foot instarect wall topped with five layers of barbed wire. They had paved nearly the entire one and a half acres with 'state of the arts' bricks. They had fitted a second hand plastic seat to the lavatory in the servant's quarters. Their home was called *Boxtraylay*: a delightful combination of Boxer and Traycee-Lay.

Craig Wick arrived, a little out of breath, just in time to welcome in the New Year. Doleen Pricter and Sindee Gwat let him in to the charmed circle, which had gathered round host Boxer Cock who had begun the count down to midnight. At the final stroke, the joyous crowd with arms about each others' waists - pressure of onyx signet rings - burst into an ear shattering rendition of Auld Lang Syne. Nobody was certain of the words except for the refrain that everybody was certain of and that everybody got wrong. As that Caledonian of Caledonians, Rudolph McMackmack, had he been invited to the party, would have told them. 'Auld lang syne' means 'old time's sake', so it's redundant and damn ridiculous to sing 'for the sake of Auld Lang Syne'. But he hadn't been invited to the party, had he? Boxer Cock is not interested in your has-beens.

After the song there was much kissing and hugging and, if the truth be known, frottage-ing. In between there were cries of "Happy New Year" and "God Bless you" and "Jesus is Lord". Many people wept: with joy at the anticipation of a new beginning, and with sadness at the recollection of time past. Boxer put on his favourite record, *Ipi Tombi*, and turned up the volume so that the window panes rattled. Then he and his guests began to dance the night away.

Not all his guests, however. Look, being an accountant is a very serious profession - you take every opportunity you can get, be it on the golf course, in the gym, at parties - even in the office at work, to discuss business and matters related to business like sex, politics, and religion. After all, the public looks up to you as a leader - usually a very rich leader - of the

community. It is from among you, Oh CAs, that Rotary International will select its finest sons, that the multinationals will select their Managing Directors, that the Church will appoint its Board of Trustees. The fact that most of you marry such idiotic women will not be held against you. Indeed it is to your advantage. For are not these same women veritable pillars of the establishment? Look how concerned they are about significant social issues like interior decorating, make-up, and dancercize. Look at the effort they put into their children's school projects. Doleen Pricter, for instance, bought a complete set of *World Books*, for the sole purpose of cutting out pictures for her son's school projects. It was worth every cent of the twenty thousand dollars because her son, Shayne Colt, who is in Grade Two at Imfukumfuku Primary School, came first in the project on Egypt. Sindee Gwat's son, Dale Star, only came second because his mother cut out pictures from their *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which aren't as colourful as those in *World Books*. (Incidentally, this has generated a certain amount of tension between the otherwise best of friends, though I must point out that the balance has been partially restored by the fact that, while Doleen has to go all the way to Johannesburg to visit her 'gynae', Sindee now has to go all the way to New York to visit hers.)

Among the high fee paying private primary schools in Bulawayo, Imfukumfuku had the reputation for being the most academic. At this school, children in Grade One were given more homework, for instance, than Sixth Formers in most secondary schools. The parents loved it, the mothers in particular. Some of the less uninformed who realised that research meant more than cutting out or photocopying pictures, became quite authoritative on subjects like Egypt, Pets, and the Amazon River. Right now a group of mothers who had at least two things in common: their children went to Imfukumfuku School, and their husbands were Chartered Accountants - the new breed; I'm not talking about those old pre Independence farts who are reluctantly making way for their young, upwardly mobile successors - as I was saying, right now a group of mothers, taking a break from the festivities, was sitting outside on the lawn showing off their knowledge to each other. Darlene Schmick knew that another name for picture writing was hieroglyphics; Sindee Gwat shocked her friends with details of the deadly piranha; Doleen Pricter stimulated some genuine amazement when she declared that rabbits loved to eat blackjacks.

Of the seven young women sitting together on the lawn, four had not yet been able to have babies because of their husbands' low sperm count. This is

an occupational hazard with men who spend too much time making money. Of the other three, Doleen had two children, two boys, both geniuses, and was trying unsuccessfully to have a third (she and Devon so wanted a little girl); Sindee had just the one little boy, also a genius, and was trying unsuccessfully to have a second (a little girl, God willing); and Darlene had three children, two girls and a boy, all geniuses, and one on the way - very likely to be a genius as well. So it wasn't surprising that the talk soon moved from school projects to gynaecological matters. Then it was "My gynae" this and "My gynae" that. They went on to talk about thrush, and bladder infections, and heavy bleeding during periods. Then they took it in turns telling each other what wonderful lovers their husbands were, and that low sperm counts had nothing to do with virility, and that 'size' didn't really matter. Darlene wasn't so sure about that, wink, wink; and she got it across to her friends by means of the most graceful of innuendoes that her husband's was a whopper. She broke into giggles when she informed them that his nickname at school had been Salami. On the subject of breast-feeding they were all in total agreement: it was disgusting and unnatural. We aren't cows, are we? Besides, it made your boobs droop. "In any case," said Sindee Gwat, "I couldn't of breast-fed even if I'd of wanted to. Inverted nipples."

"I just didn't have any milk," said Darlene Schmick.

"Engorged duct," said Doleen Pricter.

Then they moved on to a subject that brought them together more intimately than ever. The warmth of this intimacy made them all rather windy, and there was a lot of surreptitious farting going on. The subject, of course, was servants, in particular the 'girls' who were surrogate mothers to their children, and who were at this very moment looking after their children while they celebrated the passing of the Old Year and the coming of the New Year.

"You simply can't trust them any more."

"They're all thieves."

"Can't resist my sugar."

"Neglect their children."

"Thinks I don't know that she uses the phone when I'm out of the house."

"I won't have her bringing boy friends on to my property."

"Breed like flies."

"Caught her breast-feeding the baby."

“No wonder there’s so much AIDS around.”

These young mothers were loyal supporters of Imfukumfuku School but they did feel that it tended to neglect the sporting side of things. What particularly worried them was that while their rival school, Ufukufuku, introduced rugby in Grade One, Imfukumfuku introduced it only in Grade Three. And Ufukufuku offered its pupils a wider range of sports. Sindee knew of one child at Ufukufuku - her brother’s little boy, in fact - who did cricket, tennis, swimming, karate, and horse-riding in the summer terms, and rugby, hockey, tennis, kung-fu and gymnastics in the winter term. While Imfukumfuku was academically far superior to Ufukufuku, it really couldn’t boast about its contribution to the children’s sport. So these young mothers had to give up a lot of their precious interior decorating, make-up, and dancercize time to ferry their children from one private lesson to the next. Gym and horse riding on Monday, rugby club on Tuesday, swimming on Wednesday and Saturday, karate and tennis on Thursday, cricket club on Friday... honestly, it never ends. What we don’t do for our kids. And then, of course, you’ve got all that homework - all those projects - to fit in somewhere. I don’t know! I really don’t! Then they became scandalized when Doleen told them of a boy in young Shayne Colt’s class, a scholarship case, his parents were school teachers - who had to do his projects all by himself! His mother didn’t lift a finger to help him! Apart from a scruffy drawing of the sphinx, and an even scruffier map of the Nile Delta, there was not one picture in his project on Egypt. Consequently he came last in class. “Not only that,” Doleen went on, lowering her voice and speaking through an almost closed mouth in a most conspiratorial manner, “he doesn’t have a brace for his teeth!” This account of parental neglect so shocked the other women that, for a few seconds, complete silence reigned among them. They continued to fart, however.

Meanwhile the husbands of these young women who had far too much money to spend on their children and themselves, were standing together in the doorway that joined the kitchen to the dining room, beers - mine’s a Zambezi - in their hands, talking about money-related matters like their latest vehicles, houseboats, and farms. Not only were these young men Company Secretaries, Finance Managers, and Chief Accountants - they were also farmers, safari-owners, and stock brokers. Now, in their middle and late twenties, despite the fact that they were all enthusiastic joggers - well, wouldn’t you be if you owned a pair of Nikes and a pair of miniscule silken shorts? - they were already showing signs of going to seed. Bellies were

beginning to bulge over the tops of their Ted Lapidus trousers, hair was thinning on the crowns of their heads, dewlaps were slowly swinging after receding chins. It's not only your sperm that suffers when you make lots of money.

Whenever they responded to a question or an observation from a friend they would begin their response with that friend's name. They would also add an o or an s to the name. Thus, if, say John wanted to know how, say, Greg found the Merc after all those weeks with the Toyota Cressida, the conversation would go something like this:

"So, Gregs baby, what do you think of the new wheels?"

"Johno, I tell you, master, it's magic, fuckin' magic. How about your new wheels, Johno?"

"Gregs, yes. Very nice. Came with my promotion. MDs get a choice of a Merc or a BMW. I decided on a BMW - it's the Seven series - because we've already got that silver Merc that the wife uses to fetch the kid from school. Gregs, master, yours is also silver, isn't it?"

"Johno, yes, silver grey. Same colour as the Cressida."

"I expect you prefer it to the Cressida?"

"Johno, yes and no..." And so on.

These chaps are not in the same league as the Boxer Cocks of this world, you understand, and absolute peanuts compared to multi-millionaires like Craig Wick, Strontium Twot, and Sudbury Bauls; but time is on their side, and if you are that desperate to make a lot of money, you'll make it. And they are, so they will.

By far the biggest gathering of guests not at present jumping about in response to the music of *Ipi Tombi* was that which centred on the spiritual leader of these people: Brother Moral MacBraggert. He'd just finished telling them of the time, in the early years of his ministry, when he'd performed a double healing ceremony before a capacity crowd. He'd used the special power God had put in his right foot to repair a badly damaged lawn mower, and to restore to consciousness an equally badly damaged school teacher. His listeners had heard the account many times before but its impact on their Christian sensibilities was undiminished. Then he went on to tell them what he told them every Sunday in church: how he had been a drug dealer, a vandal, and a fornicator. All those drug addicts, many of them now dead, he had been responsible for; all those street signs he had bent; all those girls that he'd got 'in the family way', and the abortions he'd organized for them. Then Jesus came into his life and forgave him... "With your precious

blood, sweet Jesus, you washed away my sins, gave me a clean slate so that I could show others the Way.” At this point, whether at church or, as now, at a party, he would sob a little, and the crowd about him would respond with murmurs of “Praise the Lord”, and “Halleluiaah”, and “Amen”. It was especially those sins that he himself had been guilty of: drugs, vandalism, and sex, that Moral railed against. He held in the palm of his hand - the third finger of which bears a large gold signet ring, and smells of cinnamon and musk - all Bulawayo’s rich, very rich, and fabulously rich born again Christians.

It was fashionable at parties where anybody who was about to become anybody in Bulawayo had been invited, to ask a sprinkling of non-whites to attend. This created an exquisite feeling in the hosts and hostesses of living on the edge of peril. It is a shocking yet exciting thing for your ex-Rhodesian to entertain in his home - on his settee, mind you, eating off his plates, drinking not out of an old jam tin under a tree in the back yard, but out of proper glasses, using your toilet, for Christ’s sake! - a sprinkling of non-Europeans. The sprinkling invited to the Cock’s party included an Indian paediatrician called Vindaloo Chunder, a ‘coloured’ body builder called Porteous Papenfus, and a black couple, Nigerians who had been born and brought up in England, called Doreen and Mike Ogoja. They all behaved very well indeed.

Dr Chunder was well known, professionally, to most of the guests at the party because he treated their children. The young nouveau riche of Bulawayo tend to be over-protective of their sons and daughters and even the slightest tummy ache calls for specialist attention. None of your GPs for the likes of Traycee-Lay Cock, Doleen Pricter, Sindee Gwat, and Darlene Schmick. So while seriously ill children of peasants were dying in their hundreds for want of specialist attention, Dr Chunder was prescribing to their children antibiotics and muscle relaxants for mild colds, rugby grazes, and sore tummies from eating too many South African sweets. Vindaloo didn’t mind. It was easy and lucrative. Not quite so lucrative, mind you, as the abortions he performed on behalf of one Sobantu ‘The Butcher’ Ikherothi, who ran a brothel in town for clients who preferred their flesh young and tender. The AIDS curse had turned into a blessing for Sobantu and those who benefited directly or indirectly from his ‘empire’. Sugar Daddies and other pillars of the establishment were quick to realize that very young girls and boys were less likely to be infected with HIV than their older colleagues, so they flocked to Sobantu’s establishment. Unfortunately he

couldn't offer them too many virgins because most of his girls were working to pay him for his assistance in getting rid of their unwanted babies. The few boys he supplied for those clients who led alternative life-styles, had been 'deflowered' many times over by the two most rampant gays in Bulawayo: Porteous Papenfus and Rigby Van Poffadder.

Doreen and Mike Ogoja were confidence tricksters of the highest calibre. They dealt mainly in bogus emerald transactions and were also deeply involved in the affairs of Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi. The gullible citizens of Zimbabwe had made them very rich indeed. So you see, it's not as if the sprinkling of non-white guests at the Cocks' party were class-wise that different from their white friends. And colour, as Traycee-Lay told the sprinkling after her fourth vodka, lime and lemonade, is only skin deep.

As it happened the non-white guests were sitting together in a corner of the lounge gorging themselves on cold chicken and cocktail sausages. Vindaloo was complaining about a nephew of his called Ravi who had got into some bad company and who refused to do an honest day's work. When Vindaloo spoke English his s's came out like t's and his r's came out like d's.

"Callt himtelf a poet," he was saying of his nephew, "What good't poetdy to man od beatt? Doentn't buy bdead and butted." His listeners nodded their heads when they thought he invited approval, and shook their heads when they thought he invited disapproval. In response to the above they nodded then shook their heads. "Nothing but a blinking anadchitt, thatt what he it" (uncertain shakes), "until he dunt out of cath" (fairly confident nods), "then he comet begging to hit Uncle Vindaloo" (vigorous nods).

Porteous Papenfus kept catching the eye of this or that young accountant's wife who attended the keep-fit gym where he was gainfully employed as a demonstrator. He had a magnificent physique, and he was very good looking, which tended to unsettle the accountants rather, knowing that their wives spent hours and hours at *Bodylines*. It would have reassured them to know that Porteous was - what did Boxer Cock call them? - a Babylonian Bum Bandit. Porteous was also a mandrax, Grandpa Headache Powder, and Phensedyl cough mixture addict. A South African Freedom Fighter called Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi supplied him with the stuff: in return he helped Sobantu out - when this Treble or that Alto let him down - with those visiting Anglican priests who had a propensity for Bum Banditry.

There was a younger set of guests, friends of Traycee-Lay's brother, Comet, and her cousin, Jet, who were seniors at Black Rhino High. They planned to stay up all night and to watch the sun rise from the highest kopje in the Mabukaweni Nature Reserve, which was only a few kilometres from Boxtraylay. Meanwhile they jumped and writhed and committed frottage to the strains of *Ipi Tombi*. When Jet Bunion and his partner arrived at the party it was after 1 am. They immediately joined the riot on the dance floor. "Hey, wev u guys been?" shouted Doberman who was dancing with nobody in particular and everybody in general.

"Oh, in and out," said Jet taking his partner in his arms and, somehow, managing to negotiate a soft shoe shuffle out of *Ipi Tombi*.

"And up and down?" Doberman leered. "And over and under? I'll tell Elizabeth."

Jet ignored Doberman who was clearly drunk. His partner gave him a quizzical look, which he also ignored. "Does he mean Elizabeth Fawkes?" she asked. Jet nodded and she burst out laughing. No threat there. Jet grinned sheepishly and then pulled her against his erection. She responded by grinding it with her mons pubis and pushing her tongue provocatively into the wide gap between her front teeth. Her name was Niki Stecker and she was known at school, even among the juniors, as the Red Hot Poker. She was red, and she was hot, and, God knows, she was a poker!

So the revellers danced and they drank and they laughed and they talked and they fondled and they rubbed and they urinated and they puked and they ate and they fell over and... there goes Craig Wick with someone else's wife; and there goes someone else's husband with Craig Wick's wife; and there goes TrayceeLay with eleven other women into a quiet place - the spare bedroom - to pray with Brother MacBraggert; and there go the youngsters, now that dawn is breaking, to see the New Year in; and there stand the accountants, where they have stood all night, discussing business; and there sit the wives of the accountants, where they have been sitting for most of the night, yawning now, exhausted with talk of children and gynaecological issues and servants; and there ... oh no... the non-Europeans are nowhere to be seen: they must have left earlier. Mine host Boxer Cock is nowhere to be seen either. Hang on, there he is, the son of a gun. He's stumbling down the passage looking pale and trembly. He's been barking into the white telephone, as anybody who is about to become anybody in Bulawayo would wittily say. Let us follow him as he wanders on to the now deserted dance floor, wanders over to the Music Centre, fumbles with the

record that is already on the turntable, manages to turn it over, manages to get it playing. He joins in at the top of his voice over which, like the rest of his body, he has very little control. “*Hosa, hosa, hosa ey Intombi-a.*”

Chapter Thirteen

The Fawkes family were surprised to find several policemen and women waiting for them when they got home. “We’ve been burgled,” was Philippa’s initial response. They had been burgled: by their domestic worker, Mrs Amazambane, who had helped herself to five fowls - two grey and three black Australorps - a pink dress belonging to ‘the madam’, three boxes of matches, a packet of sugar, a stainless steel dessert spoon, and about thirty aspirins. But that was not why the police were there.

As the old VW Combi pulled into the yard, which boasted some of the densest bush in Matabeleland, Bones the dog and Gerty the goose were there to meet it. A flock of arrow-marked babblers was causing a commotion in the *Bauhenia galpinii* where the children had their den. A pair of Egyptian geese was resting on the corrugated tin roof of the house. On a branch of the *Pappea capensis*, the indaba tree, which grew next to the garage, a striped kingfisher perched, his heavy red beak seeming to pull his head ever downwards - where the juicy insects: grasshoppers, beetles, praying mantises, and caterpillars, teemed. Sir Percy, high up in the *Kirkia accuminata*, and Earl Grey, low down in the sadly depleted fowl run, were having a crowing contest. “Look out, Dad!” Elizabeth called as she noticed Tim the tortoise sunning himself in the middle of the driveway. Phillip stopped in time, and Philippa got out and gently moved the reptile, of order *Chelonia*, to a safe place in the grass, a patch of *rhynchelytrum repens* looking lovely in the morning light with its silky pink spikelets.

While Phillip parked the car, Philippa walked over to the gathering of law enforcement officers, a man and three women, who seemed to be finding something very amusing. “Good morning,” she said, “can I help you?” The source of their amusement, she discovered, was Ronald the rabbit who was doing his best to mount a very broody Mrs Noodle. “Ronald, stop that!” she said, and she picked him up and proceeded to scratch his ears. “And Mrs Noodle, you go back to your eggs.”

The officers looked at each other and shook their heads. These *amakhiwa* (whites) were crazy. “Good morning,” said the officer in charge - the man - “how are you?”

“Very well, thank you,” replied Mrs Fawkes. “Is there anything the matter?” Her husband and daughter came over, and polite greetings were exchanged. Elizabeth took Ronald from her mother and gave him a hug. Bones was dashing excitedly from one person to the next. He had a bad habit

of pressing his nose into the crotches of human beings, which caused the Fawkes some embarrassment. Each officer in turn got a snoutful. Gerry kept nibbling the backside of one of the women officers who would yelp and push her away. "Stop that, Gerry!" said Philippa. "Bones! Behave yourself!"

The officer in charge wanted to know where they had been, how long they had been away, if there were any other members of the family, whether they employed any domestic workers; did they sell eggs, could he collect some firewood from their property... Eventually he came round to the shocking reason for a police presence on their property this second day of January, 1992. Some children had discovered a dead baby hidden in a tree in a corner of the yard. Did the Fawkses know anything about it? Elizabeth burst into tears, Philippa sank to the ground, and Phillip had to support himself against the water tank. Very suspicious behaviour all round. Very suspicious indeed.

One of the women officers was most officious. She demanded to know if either Mrs Fawkes or Miss Fawkes had given birth recently, and when they shook their heads she insisted on feeling their breasts to see if they were in milk. "What is this?" she demanded of Elizabeth when her probing fingers came into contact with the Asil Khan egg.

"It's an egg," said Elizabeth trying to stifle her sobs. "The poor baby. Who could do such a terrible thing?" She began to pray quietly to Jesus.

"What egg is this?" said the bemused officer giving Elizabeth a baleful look.

"It's a chicken's egg," Phillip answered. "It's mine. I won it in a raffle. My daughter is hatching it for me."

The police officers looked at each other in amazement. The officious woman said something in Sindebele that was not complimentary towards white people. She insisted on having a look at the egg, so Elizabeth dug it out of her bra and displayed it. It was as warm as love. The officer put out her hand to take it and then changed her mind. She clicked her tongue in disgust. Elizabeth put it back.

Then the officer in charge spoke. "You must accompany us to the police station. We will need to interrogate you further. May you please give us a lift in your vehicle?"

Mrs Fawkes stood up and dusted off her pink track suit. She took her daughter's hand then she said, "Is the dead baby black or white?"

The officers were not at all pleased with this question and accused Philippa of being a racist. However, it eventually came out that the deceased

was black. Philippa then wanted to know why she and her daughter had been handled in such a degrading manner when the baby could not possibly have been theirs. The officious woman officer accused her of interfering with the course of the law, of obstructing the police in their investigations, of racism, colonialism, and imperialism.

Eventually a compromise was struck. The police officers vacated the premises, each with a bundle of firewood and each with four fresh eggs and a bottle of beer. The Fawkes were given orders to report to the police station every day until the mystery of the dead baby on their property was solved. They never did.

It was while collecting eggs in the fowl run for the police officers that Philippa and Phillip discovered that five of their hens were missing. Phillip reported this to the police and suggested that it might have some connection with the dumped baby. Now, all four of these police officers had been guests at the Old Year's night party thrown by the Amazambanes and the Ilithangas at Number Three, Cornwall Crescent. All had gorged themselves on Mrs Amazambane's delicious boiled chicken. Oh the long, long arm of coincidence! How were they to know that they had helped get rid of the evidence of this theft by eating it? The officer in charge made a note of the theft, said he would investigate it, but didn't think there was likely to be much of a connection between baby dumping and chicken stealing.

The neighbouring children who had been waiting only for the police to go, emerged from their hideout in the dense foliage of the *Bauhenia galpinii*, and made a rush for Elizabeth. She hugged them and kissed them and tumbled with them, and the pets, in the grass. They were very upset to see her swollen, tear stained face, and Komkommer started to cry in sympathy. Then Nightingale started to cry. Then Wordsworth. Then Florence. The three remaining children: Washington, Shakespeare, and Koejawel, managed, by biting their bottom lips, to quell their sobs. Collectively, they outdid the arrow-marked babblers for commotion. For they were talking as well as crying, each giving his and her version of the terrible discovery. Elizabeth gleaned this much: that they had been playing Hide and Seek, that Washington had been on, that Nightingale had gone into the densest part of the garden (they pointed to the Lysander Avenue corner; Elizabeth nodded) that she had climbed the marula tree there, that she had found, in a hollow of the tree, a parcel wrapped in newspaper and tied up in a plastic bag, and that it had turned out to be a dead baby.

"Oh you poor things," said Elizabeth, then she reached for Nightingale

and pulled her into her arms, taking care not to crush the Asil Khan.

They sobbed and cried for a bit longer, then Komkommer said, "Elizabeth, please will you tell us a story?"

"Of course I will," Elizabeth replied, "shall we go to the hideout?"

"Yes, let's," said Washington, and he led the way.

Once inside the hideout, they grouped closely around Elizabeth, with Komkommer, the youngest, on her lap, and she told them the story of Abraham and Isaac. "Once upon a time," she began, "God told Abraham to take his only son, Isaac, whom Abraham loved very dearly, to a far off mountain, there to offer up a sacrifice to..."

"What is a sacrifice?" Nightingale interrupted.

"That's when you give up something you value very much for the sake of someone who is worthier than you, like the Lord."

"What is worthier?"

"More important. In the time of Abraham people showed their love [Jet would say fear] of God by sacrificing one of their precious animals to him: a sheep or a goat, or even a cow. So Abraham was to offer up a sacrifice to God, and he was to take his son with him."

"Isaac?"

"Yes."

"We've got an Uncle called Isaac," said Washington.

"Well, that's a very noble name," said the patient Elizabeth.

"He took the petty cash, Dad says, and now he's in Khami prison."

"That's very unfortunate."

"Dad visits him every week, but we aren't allowed."

"Anyway, so Abraham called his son, and saddled his ass..."

"His ass?"

"His donkey, Shakespeare. He called his son and saddled his... donkey, and they journeyed to the far off mountain."

"Did they pack some food, Elizabeth?"

"Yes, Koejawel, they packed some food... some boerewors, and sadza, and relish..."

"Elizabeth!" Her mother was calling.

"Coming, Mom!" She eased Komkommer off her lap and said, "Sorry guys, I'm wanted up at the house. Who would like some juice?"

There was a chorus of, "Yes, please."

"All right. I'll finish the story later. In the meantime why don't you have a game of Hide... er... Cowboys and Crooks."

She left them to quarrel over who were going to be the ‘goodies’ and who were going to be the ‘baddies’, thinking suddenly of Hamlet’s: ‘There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so’, and thinking then of the constant arguments that went on in their English lessons on this theme. Mr Lipp said that religions over-simplified good and evil, that the words themselves, albeit abstractions, were over-simplifications. Take one letter out of ‘good’ and you’ve got ‘god’; put one letter into ‘evil’ and you’ve got ‘devil’. ‘God’ spelt backwards, as James Joyce pointed out, is ‘dog’; ‘devil’ spelt backwards is ‘lived’. As Hamlet also said: “Words, words, words”, which Mr Lipp claimed, was the second most significant quotation in all English literature. The most significant was “Bah, humbug!”

Elizabeth found her mother in the lounge holding open a copy of Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane*. Her father was busy unpacking the car. “Yes, Mom?” she said.

“I’ve been checking up on that word ‘valorise’, Elizabeth. Eliade does...”

“Mom! I’m halfway through a story with the children. Can’t it wait?”

“Don’t you want me to explain it to you?” Philippa looked a little hurt.

“Oh all right, Mom; but I doubt if I’ll understand a word you say.” She sat down impatiently on the arm of her mother’s chair.

“It isn’t difficult. Let’s look at this section on water on page 129. Now where was it? Oh yes, here: look: ‘Before treating of the earth, we must present the religious valorisations of the waters.’ In other words he is going to fix the value, the significance, of water to religion.”

“Like baptism?”

“Yes, my girl - like baptism. Of course, the Christians didn’t discover the symbolic value of water, but they added to it. As Eliade points out, water is given tremendous value by the Old Testament because it states in Genesis that water existed before the earth. Here,” she ran her finger along the print, “Eliade quotes: ‘Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters’. Water is a useful religious symbol because it is paradoxical. Have you read Moby Dick?”

“I started it once. I got as far as ‘Call me Ishmael’.”

“Don’t be facetious, Elizabeth!”

“Sorry Mom. Why is water paradoxical?”

“It symbolises degeneration as well as regeneration; death as well as life...”

“Why do you always say death first?”

“To redress the balance. For the same reason that I try to say ‘women and men’ instead of ‘men and women’...”

“But it’s always ‘ladies and gentlemen’?”

“Most men use the word ‘lady’ as a term of contempt. They open doors for them, and let them go through first, but they deny them any effective power like the control of property, for instance. It’s a vulgar word if it’s used to mean anything other than a formal title.”

“Like ‘Lady Godiva’?”

“Yes, young lady.” They both laughed.

“Go back to valorising water. I’m getting interested.”

“Right. On page 130, Eliade talks about immersion and emersion. Being immersed in the water symbolises a kind of death; being emersed...”

“You mean like ‘emerge’?”

“Yes. I don’t think you’ll find it in the dictionary... means, symbolises, a kind of re-birth.”

“Baptism.”

“Yes. I suppose so. He uses the word again on page 111. Here: ‘Christianity goes even further in valorising historical time. Since God was incarnated, that is, since he took on a historically conditioned human existence, history acquires the possibility of being sanctified.’ You see, for primitive religious man...”

“Or woman.”

“Touché. Or woman... there was sacred time and there was profane time. By means of rituals primitive woman or man could move between the two. Sacred time is the beginning of creation...”

“With a big ‘C’!”

“Yes, if you like..., the Beginning, the Forever, the Eternal... Timeless Time. How’s that for a paradox?”

“I’m sure Mr Lipp would be very impressed, Mom.”

“He’s the one to speak to, Elizabeth. I know Boland is not much of a Christian but, believe me, he is a deeply religious man.”

“Sounds like a contradiction to me.”

“Well it would. You fundamentalists are so self-righteous.”

“Mom!”

“Sorry, love, I don’t mean you specifically. And profane time, of course, is historical time. ‘Ordinary temporal duration’ is how Eliade puts it. But Christianity is a historical event that took place in profane time - when Pontius Pilate governed in Judaea. So it kind of merges the sacred and the

profane. Christianity valorises profane time by sanctifying it with Christ's historicity..."

"Mom, can we leave it at that? My brain is beginning to feel like cotton wool."

"Mine too." Philippa closed the book. "I must go and prepare my seeds for planting. Why don't you see if you can find some biscuits for the kids." She stood up rather wearily. "I'm sad about those fowls. I hope whoever took them, was very hungry with a very hungry family to support. Mark my words, Elizabeth, there are bad times ahead."

Elizabeth was about to berate her mother for worrying about the stolen fowls after a dead baby had been found on their property when Philippa slumped back into her chair and burst into tears. Elizabeth knelt to her, buried her head in the pink track suit and said, "Don't cry, Mom, Mrs Noodle will hatch us out some more."

"Oh it's not the fowls, Elizabeth," her mother replied in a sob-shaken voice, "It's the baby. How can anybody abandon her baby? I don't understand. I just don't understand."

"But Mom, we read about baby dumping nearly every week in the newspaper! Goodness knows how many go unrecorded." She cradled her mother's head in her arms. It smelt faintly of baby shampoo.

"But why, Elizabeth? Why?"

"I don't know. A mother must be very desperate to abandon her baby. I remember we talked about it once, in English. At first no one had any sympathy for the mothers, but Mr Lipp got us to think about it and to discuss it. He said we had no idea of the straitened economic conditions in which many of these women, frequently young girls, lived. Then there was fear of recriminations from their parents, fear of expulsion from school, fear of being ditched by their boy friends, fear of the responsibility for which they were totally unprepared. What angered Mr Lipp the most was the way these women were abandoned by the men who impregnated them, men who were the first to condemn - from the pulpit, at the political rally, in the boardroom - abortion and baby dumping." While she talked Elizabeth gently massaged her mother's scalp, and the heaving gradually subsided. "Still, it is hard to understand. I'm so lucky I've got a mother like you, and a father like Dad - even if you are a pair of heathens."

Philippa looked up, and they smiled at each other. "My Elizabeth," she quietly said, and Elizabeth immediately remembered Mr Lipp's example of authorial intrusion in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, one of her favourite

books: "My Fanny", he had quoted, and the class had burst out laughing. Then she thought of Henry Crawford, his intention to make Fanny fall in love with him, make a little hole in her heart. Then she thought fleetingly of Jet. They stood up together. Mrs Fawkes said: "Those children will be wondering where you've got to. I'll go and give Dad a hand with the unpacking, then I must see to the seeds." From somewhere inside her track suit she pulled out a faded pink handkerchief and blew her nose decisively.

Elizabeth went to the kitchen and poured plastic cups of orange juice for the children. She rummaged around in the grocery cupboard and found a packet of shortbread and three packets of jelly powder. She put everything on a tray and carried it carefully to *Ubungane*. The children had been patiently waiting for her. She handed out cool drinks and biscuits, then she poured little heaps of jelly powder - lemon, lime, and raspberry - into cupped palms. Washington asked if they couldn't have a different story: Abraham wasn't so interesting. Elizabeth suggested Tom Thumb. No, they'd had Tom Thumb on the day the baby was discovered. Cinderella? No, they'd had it too often recently. Hansel and Gretel? Yes, hooray. The children loved Elizabeth's highly embellished description of the edible house. So while they munched contentedly on biscuits, and dipped their tongues into the jelly powder, and sipped ice cold orange juice, Elizabeth began: "Once upon a time there was a little boy called Hansel and a little girl called..."

"Elizabeth! Phone!" It was her father.

"Coming!" she called. "Sorry guys. I'll be back in a mo'. Washington, why don't you carry on with the story in the mean time?" No, they would rather wait for Elizabeth. She ran to the house. "Hullo. Elizabeth Fawkes speaking."

"Hullo Lizzie, it's Jet Bunion here."

"Jet?" Her heart pounded.

"Look, it will be a full moon on the nineteenth, which is a Sunday. I wondered if you'd like to take a drive out to the Matopos, maybe spend the night there, to watch it rise."

"Will there be..."

"We can go in a group, if you'd rather."

"I think my parents would be happier if there was a group of us, Jet."

"That's fine, I can arrange it. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will. I'm sure my parents won't mind."

"Even if we camp for the night?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll check with them and let you know, Jet."

“Great. We’ll read some poems. Do you know Byron’s ‘Hebrew Melodies’?”

““So we’ll go no more a roving/so late into the night...””

““Though the heart be still as loving,/and the moon be still as bright...’. See you at school, if not before... and Lizzie?”

“Yes, Jet?”

“Thanks for coming.”

“Thank you for asking me.”

““The dame said, ‘Your servant...’””

““The dog said, ‘Bow wow’.””

“Bye.”

“Bye.” She put down the receiver.

All the way back to *Ubungane*, Elizabeth prayed quietly to Jesus.

Chapter Fourteen

January 19 arrived with overcast skies threatening rain. Just what Bulawayo needed if the city was going to survive until the next season. The water from the taps was beginning to taste like mud, with a suggestion of barbel. Because of stringent rationing, not enough water was running through the sewers and they were regularly becoming blocked, not only by paper and excrement but by condoms, foetuses, and a growing number of fully formed babies. At times the stench was unbearable. People were talking of cholera and typhoid epidemics. Those who were in a position to, and anybody who was anybody (or about to become anybody) in Bulawayo was in a position to, were making evacuation plans. Brother Moral MacBraggert, for instance, was in the process of evicting the tenants from his cottage on the south coast, near Margate, where he would live until the Zambezi pipeline to Bulawayo had been completed - if it ever would be. Besides, Margate was a hive of sin - all those bikinis - and there would be plenty to do for a man of the cloth, albeit a safari suit, and powder-blue at that.

For the Twots it was easy. They would have to go no further than Gwanda, move onto one of the Wicks' farms. Hadn't Craig already extended an open invitation to Daylene of *Bodylines* and... er... the family? Strontium could entrust the running of his garage and associated businesses to his senior mechanic - bit of a sucker but a bladdy good worker - 'Guy' Fawkes.

Evacuation wouldn't be an issue for Rudolph McMackmack because - didn't you hear? - he died last week, on the first day of the school term. Yes, the school secretary found him in his office, at the place behind the door where, over the years, he had done so much fondling and caning. His willy was stuck in a jar of hell-fire sauce. The shock must have stopped his heart. Poor Doef. She has no children, and soon she may have no water to splash into her cane spirit. Her garden is dead. Crimplene is virtually unobtainable. She is thinking of re-joining her sister, Lilac-Time, who runs a brothel for the elderly in Eastbourne, Sussex. The School Board was privately jubilant over Rudolph's demise. Now they could give the post to their blue-eyed boy, science teacher - evolution be damned - Dale Forskine. Not only was Dale a devout, some would say fanatical, Born Again Christian, but he doted on rugby and water polo. He would make it an absolute priority, as headmaster, to thrash Falcon and Pawpaw at those sports. He wasn't that interested in girls' sport although he would submit himself to routine inspections of the swimmers in their revealing speedo costumes, and the hockey players in

their skimpy skirts; and he would encourage the teams to triumph over their chief rivals: Girls' College and Convent.

Out on the Old Gwanda Road, Ingeborg Ficker had abundant water in her dams and her boreholes. She would be staying put for the foreseeable future, to see out the completion of her masterpiece: the Old Gwanda Giantess, which was already threatening to displace the Victoria Falls as Zimbabwe's premier tourist attraction. If you want to pay homage to her, she has open house - Rhodes excluded - on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. I have it, from a reliable source, that she and Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi have broken up, so those of you who might fancy your chances in the valley of a thousand thrills, now is the hour. Sobantu has returned to his homeland to take his rightful place in the negotiations for a new political order in South Africa. Ideologically, the Jogskyites are left of AZAPO who are left of the PAC who are left of the ANC and the Communists. They talk of purges, purges, and more purges. Their numbers are relatively small but they have abundant wealth generated by their interests in emeralds, mandrax, baby dumping and related activities. They also receive some support, a mere trickle really, from a well-intentioned equestrian club in England who are under the illusion that the Jogskyites are a branch of the SPCA that focuses on the welfare of retired work horses.

Gymnogene Pigge, the teachers - Simon and Nicholas, Fark Ruckles. Kathleen O'Toole-bag - and all those other ex-pats who came out to Zimbabwe for the right reasons, have now decided to leave Zimbabwe for the right reasons: you can't get sugar, you can't get matches, you can't get rice, you can't get cooking oil - you can't even get mealie meal. And what you can get is too expensive. The last straw for Gymnogene Pigge was when the price of beer went up yet again. Besides, with Sobantu 'The Butcher' Ikherothi returning to South Africa, his income from baby dumping was threatened. And his relatives had been bled white. So apart from his friendship with the likes of Ravi Chunder, Jealous Umbankwa, and Skies Izindebe, there was nothing to keep him in Zimbabwe. The last I heard, he and his Harris Tweed Jacket were heading for Zambia. Simon and Nicholas are on their way to Namibia, someone told me, there to vilify the boers, screw the Hereros, and bolster the fledgling Gallopskyite party which has opened an office in downtown Swakopmund. Apparently Fark and Doss and Afghan and Litotes have found research posts at the University of Bophuthatswana, where they could spend the next decade writing up their

PhD theses. Aid money from Canada and Sweden is still available to them. As long as your research is relevant - and theirs is - and in the interests of human welfare - and theirs is, by God - the precious foreign currency will keep pouring in. Yes, I too have heard the rumours, but Fark's allocation goes into his personal bank account for one reason, and one reason only: easy access. He doesn't want his vital research to drag. Fuck it. I mean!

Boxer Cock and others of his ilk have been assured by the man they most admire in the world: Sudbury Bauls, that in their lines of business things would improve in proportion to the suffering and distress of the people in general. He didn't go into details but he winked and poured a round of scotch and said: "Trust me." They more than trust him; they love him. In his capacity as chairman of the Black Rhino High School Board, he has assured anxious parents that he and Matilda would never allow the school to shut down as so many schools in Bulawayo would surely have to. Contingency plans had already been made by a consortium of businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants, to keep Black Rhino High alive for the duration of the terrible times to come. Keeping Black Rhino alive meant, basically, to ensure that all First Team rugby fixtures went ahead as scheduled.

Those people who would not or could not leave Bulawayo either because they didn't want to or couldn't afford it - in the first category the Fawkes family and Boland Lipp (now out of a job) come to mind; and in the second category the Reeboks, the Amazambanes, the Ilithangas, and Mrs Afrodite Fawkes come to mind - those people would simply have to endure. As Boland Lipp would tell you were he not so preoccupied with finding employment: "The readiness is all."

When Elizabeth woke up that Sunday morning and pulled aside her curtain and saw that the day was overcast - she saw it through the feathery leaves of the *Albizia amara* that grew outside her window and which hosted a family of boubou shrikes - her first thought was for the full moon. Would they get a chance to see it behind all that cloud? Jet and the others would be picking her up at about five o'clock in the afternoon. They had chosen World's View for the vigil - near the grave of Cecil John Rhodes. Weather permitting, they would spend the night next to his remains. Elizabeth had suggested Mtshелеle Dam but the others had out-voted her.

She thought of Jet's earlier proposal and her heart began to thump. Perhaps he'd been joking and she was wrong to detect any ulterior motive in this moon-watching expedition. Perhaps he thought of Elizabeth as a kindred

spirit, their religious differences notwithstanding - someone who loved poetry as he loved it, who recoiled, as he did, at the hypocrisy of a community of which Black Rhino High was a microcosm. A kindred spirit, not a sexual partner. Elizabeth's good angel encouraged this line of thinking; her bad angel, on the other hand, wanted nothing to do with it. Her bad angel kept pumping into her head scattered phrases from the Song of Solomon: 'open to me'... 'filled with dew...': 'put in his hands by the hole'... 'withdrawn himself'; 'thy navel'..., oh, thy navel..., and her fingers began to explore the fine hair that grew on her pubic mound. It was Jet himself who had argued with her about that word. Couldn't she see that the simile following was inappropriate? As a student of poetry taught by the very finest student of poetry - in Bulawayo at any rate - couldn't she see that it was ridiculous to compare a belly button with 'a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor'? A pudendum, on the other hand... Elizabeth blushed deeply, quite as deeply as she had blushed that day when she and Jet had argued about it.

She walked her fingers up and down her navel for a while then she got up to wash and dress for church. (When she changed her bra she carefully transferred the egg, which would hatch in a couple of days' time.) Mr Forskine, her new headmaster, who lived a few houses down, would give her a lift to the Blood of Jesus Temple which was situated in the centre of town. It was to be Brother MacBraggert's valedictory sermon. He would soon be off on a crusade to save sinners up and down the south coast. The man is a saint.

As she brushed her fine dark hair and fixed it with a plain white Alice band, not in front of a mirror, she thought of the rapid changes that were taking place in her little world. Two of the most important people in her life, Brother MacBraggert and Mr Lipp, were moving away. Her new English teacher, Mrs Ripples, was hopeless. She didn't teach, she proselytised - with the help of various Christian organizations like 'Kids for Christ' and 'The Jesus Gang' who showed them anti-abortion videos of seven month old fetuses being crushed to bits inside the mother's womb, and reminded the pupils that it was against God's will to take a human life even if it was a one minute old foetus. In the next breath they called for the restoration of capital punishment in the so-called enlightened countries that had abandoned it, and blessed the Zimbabwean government for hanging on to it; if only they would apply it more frequently, not only to murderers, but to rapists and drug peddlers, and baby dumpers who were, in any case, murderers most foul, Praise the Lord. Mrs Ripples wouldn't touch modern literature, poetry in

particular, with a barge pole. Even Shakespeare had to be taught out of abridged texts, and Chaucer was banned outright. Besides, she didn't understand that silly sounding Middle English. I mean, why can't he just say 'he picked up her cigarette and put it to her lips' instead of 'Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng'? What a load of twaddle! Once a week, during a double period, the pupils would sit through one of Mrs Ripple's personal 700 Club videos which they would then discuss in relation to their set works. In this way they achieved some interesting insights into the minds of characters like Michael Henchard and Cleopatra. For Mrs Ripples there was only one theme in literature and that was the conflict between good and evil. She divided the entire 'A' level syllabus into two columns. All the authors and nearly all the characters found themselves in the 'evil' column.

The Blood of Jesus Temple was packed with worshippers - virtually all white - all ready to weep in tongues at the imminent departure of their beloved preacher, Brother Moral MacBraggart. There he stood with his blonde, blow-waved hair and his hyper-active Adam's apple, dressed in his familiar powder-blue safari suit, no socks (you man of the people, you!) and sweetly tapered espadrilles. They clapped out a hymn that rhymed 'Lord' with 'sword', 'poured', 'afford', and 'snored'. Then they prayed for the families of businessmen, commercial farmers, successful criminals, and senior civil servants... in short they prayed for themselves. Well why not? Wouldn't you if you felt that your world was falling apart, for the second time in a little over ten years? I mean, be reasonable! When Brother Moral climbed on to the workout bench that served as a pulpit, his face was grim. Apart from steady weeping, one or two spontaneous orgasms - the noisiest coming from Traycee-Lay Cock who was receiving a gang visitation from all twelve of the disciples - silence reigned.

"Brothers and sisters," he began, clearing his throat and pitching his voice tremulously low, "I am not here to judge you but to save you." He gave Traycee-Lay a quick, irritated look because her glossolalia, which came out something like: "Oh my Guhd, oh my Guhd... yasyas yas, yasyas yas... in-nin-nin (she was on her seventh disciple), her glossolalia was interfering with his delivery. He raised his voice three-tenths of a bel and continued: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by... er.. me."

Elizabeth, who was standing right at the back of the congregation - Mr Forskine had wormed his way to the front - did not wait to hear any more. She felt suddenly stifled. She couldn't face, yet again, the testimony that

would follow these eclectic pronouncements of Christ spoken as if they were the eclectic pronouncements of Moral MacBraggert. Mr Forskine had upset her in the car, going on about Mr Lipp, calling him the Antichrist and saying that Black Rhino High was well rid of him; and how lucky the school was to get Mrs Ripples who set such wonderful Christian standards for the pupils to emulate. He, in his capacity as headmaster, approved of the way she disciplined the juniors by making them go down on their knees. Whether the offence was a small one like eating sweets in class, or a large one like writing on the toilet walls, she dealt with it always in the same way: "You will go down on your knees this instant, and re-commit yourself to Christ!" It worked. The younger pupils were terrified of her. Elizabeth stepped out into the overcast morning and began the long walk home. Before she left she asked one of the temple wardens who was standing at the door, a soft-faced character called Duiker Berry, to inform Mr Forskine that she had left.

Surely it wasn't the headmaster and the preacher that stifled Elizabeth. How could it be? They were Christians. If she felt stifled suddenly by good people then she must look elsewhere for the cause. Was it the weather? The humidity had produced tiny beads of sweat on her top lip, and she was uncomfortably aware of the egg in her bra. There was not the hint of a breeze. Like the beginning of the storm in *Swallows and Amazons*: one of her favourite childhood books: 'The heaviness of thunder in the air'.

Partly the weather, yes; but also her involvement with Jet. If anybody was the Antichrist... Mr Lipp had never, to her knowledge, been anti-Christian. He was the most tolerant person she'd ever met... which was, she supposed... which could be construed by some... tolerance... as unChristian. The reasonably tolerant churches like the Anglicans are dying. The intolerant fundamentalists like... yes... like me, are thriving. Oh Jet, what am I doing?

He fetched her shortly after five o'clock. He came on his motor bike and he carried a spare crash helmet. He was wearing his torn leather jacket. Apparently the others would meet up with them at World's View. Mr and Mrs Fawkes looked a little worried but they made no objections. They were pleased that Elizabeth was doing something, for once, that hadn't been organized by her church, or Kids for Christ, or The Jesus Gang, or whatever. When Elizabeth saw the bike she went to change into a pair of jeans. Meanwhile Jet chatted to her parents without actually getting off the bike. He scratched Bones's ears and tapped Gertrude's beak, and smiled at all the stray children who watched him shyly from the entrance to their den. He was a very good looking boy.

Elizabeth came out with a high colour in her cheeks. She stuffed her things in Jet's half-empty kit bag and put it over her shoulder. He helped her to put on the crash helmet, then he steadied her while she climbed onto the bike behind him. He warned her not to put her feet on the ground once they had begun to move, and he advised her to hold onto him by putting her arms round his waist. It was a narrow waist, and hard with muscle. He also showed her how to lean over to one side when they took a corner. They waved goodbye and roared off. Earlier that afternoon there had been some scattered thunder showers in the vicinity of Bulawayo. Now the sun had come out but in the south, over the Matopos National Park, the sky was black. Mr Fawkes had reminded Jet that the road might be wet, so he would need to take extra care. Jet had reassured him.

Once they were on the main Matopos road, Jet opened up the throttle, and Elizabeth felt herself clinging to him for dear life. At first she was frightened. She kept her eyes shut and she pushed her face into Jet's back. Gradually, however, her panic subsided and she began to enjoy the ride, the wind rushing at her face and whipping up those strands of her hair that were free of the crash helmet; the delicious vibrations that came up from the seat of the bike and tingled her legs and the base of her spine. Her clinging relaxed into a holding, thence into an embracing. My Jet, she thought, I've got you all to myself. And she gave thanks to Jesus. She leaned her face on his back and sniffed deeply the billowing leather of his jacket. How did Thom Gunn put it? (Gunn was Jet's favourite poet): 'The sniff of the real, that's what I'd want'. No doubt they'd be reading together some Thom Gunn - if the moon were to give them sufficient light. Once, it was as they were going past the research station, Jet reached his left hand behind him and gave her a pat on the knee. Elizabeth grinned with happiness.

When they sped past the turn-off to World's View. Elizabeth became a little anxious. She tapped Jet's shoulder and shouted: "You've missed the turning." Either Jet didn't register, or pretended not to register. Her tap turned into a thump and she almost screamed: "You've missed the turning."

Jet slowed right down, then he brought the bike to a stop. She let go of him. "Look," he said pointing at the bush ahead and to the right of them. A solitary old sable bull with a magnificent pair of sweeping horns on a head held high, watched them calmly. "It's black."

"Jet black," said Elizabeth; "You missed the turning, Black Jet!"

He didn't answer right away; the animal absorbed him: its mane of stiff black hairs, its white nose and belly contrasting with the glossy black of its

coat, its formidable horns. "They get blacker as they get older."

"'Sable' means black, after all."

"'A sable silvered'."

"'Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off'."

He turned then to her and smiled. "You had a good English teacher."

"So did you, Jet, but don't change the subject: why did you miss the turning to World's View?"

"Because we're going to your spot at Mtshелеle. Wouldn't you prefer that?"

"Where are the others?"

"There are no others."

"Jet!"

"Lizzie!"

"You deceived my parents."

"And you. Hold on..." and he took off with such acceleration that he nearly left Elizabeth and the kit bag behind. She had to lunge for his waist. The sable bull watched them disappearing down the road.

The camp at Mtshелеle was deserted. Elizabeth guided Jet to the spot where she and her parents had camped over New Year. He parked the bike under the wild fig exactly on the spot where they had set up their tent.

"Ow! pins and needles," said the girl as she got her feet back on terra firma. "Thanks for the ride, Jet, it was wonderful."

"You're welcome," he replied, helping her off with the crash helmet and relieving her of the kit bag. "What did you bring to eat, apart from yourself?"

She blushed and said, "Don't be vulgar." Then she looked straight into his baby blue eyes and said, "Do you intend to seduce me?"

It was his turn to blush. "Let's play it by ear, shall we?"

Elizabeth giggled. "Jet, I might be a naive virgin who palpitates at the thought of holding hands with a boy she fancies, but I have read a few books, and I have seen the animals at it, so I do know that ears have very little to do with the game."

He said nothing in reply but took off his crash helmet and placed it on a stone. Then he took her in his arms and bent to her. She parted her lips - her mother's perfect mouth - in anticipation of a kiss. He by-passed her lips and, instead, pressed his tongue in her left ear. The sensation made her nipples tighten, and she sighed with pleasure. He released her and began to rummage in the kit bag. Elizabeth's home made Cornish pasties and the bottle of tea had been wrapped in newspaper to keep them warm.

Elizabeth giggled again and said, "I stand corrected. Ears, it seems, have more than a little to do with the game."

"Don't call it a game," said Jet, "let's eat while we can still see. I doubt if there will be much of a moon tonight." They both looked up at the sky, which was heavy with cloud. Elizabeth helped him unwrap the pasties. There were two each. They were still warm.

"Hang on," she said, "let's take our picnic to that rock over there." She pointed to the slab of lichen pocked granite overhanging the water where she had dreamed of the reality that now confronted her. They gathered up the things and transferred them to the flat rock that was big enough to accommodate, comfortably, two bodies.

"This is great," said Jet stretching himself out on the rock and gazing at the languid lilies on the dam among which a family of red-billed teal were feeding.

"Look at the ducks, Lizzie."

"Yes I know," said Elizabeth making a place for herself next to him and looking out over the beautiful stretch of water. "*Anas erythrorhyncha*."

"You sound just like your mother." He stroked her shoulder.

She turned to him. Her eyes were full of love. "It is a game for you, Jet. You said that you would become a Christian if I let you make love to me under the full moon. You weren't serious were you? It's common knowledge, the way you treat girls. I've heard them talk."

"Let's eat," he said. "Did you see, I brought a bottle of wine and some imported chocolate?"

"I saw the wine but I didn't see any chocolate. What kind is it?"

"Have a look. It's right at the bottom. Underneath my *Eleven British Poets*."

She dug down into the kit back, felt under the book, and came in contact with a small cardboard package. She pulled it out and read aloud: "'Protector. Condoms for family planning. 3 electronically-tested condoms for strength and safety.' Some chocolate!"

Jet sat up. "Well, we've got to take precautions, Elizabeth. Women conceive more easily when the moon is full, you know."

"Nonsense." She tossed the little packet back into the bag and passed it over to Jet. "You find the chocolate."

He felt about inside the bag, pulled out the bottle of wine: it was a Mukuyu Pinotage, pulled out a corkscrew, a jersey, a bottle of mosquito repellent and, finally, a slab of chocolate. He passed it to her.

In the dying light she had to strain her eyes to read. "It's Lindt," she said, "Wow-ee, Jet; where did you get hold of Swiss Chocolate?"

"I swiped it from my mother's wardrobe."

A single cape turtle dove was calling from the other side of the dam. Two white-necked ravens and a yellow-billed kite had appeared from nowhere and were showing a great interest in the Cornish pasties. In the kopje nearest to them, halfway up its rocky slope, a troop of monkeys crashed about in the trees.

While Jet opened the wine, Elizabeth shared out the pasties. He poured the wine into the two plastic cups she had brought for the tea. "Cheers," he said, passing her a cup.

"Cheers." She looked doubtfully at the red liquid in the green cup. "You've given me a lot, Jet; I'm not used to alcohol, you know."

"Leave what you don't want. I'll find a good home for it." They sipped contentedly at the wine, and munched their pasties. The rain seemed to be holding off. "Isn't this the life?" said Jet rolling over onto his back, a green plastic cup of wine in one hand and a delicious, meaty pie in the other.

"You'd better sit up before you get indigestion."

"I can see a few stars. Maybe the clouds are lifting."

"Maybe." She put down her pie and touched his hair.

He put down his pie, and his wine, and moved onto his side, facing her. She smiled at him. "My Elizabeth," he said.

"My Fanny," she giggled.

He cupped his hand very gently over that place; she was sitting, leaning back slightly. Her breath began to come quickly. He took his hand away and drank some more wine. "Lie back Lizzie, and look up at the stars," he said. "More and more of them are appearing: 'my sad captains'."

"That's Shakespeare, isn't it?"

"Yes. And Thom Gunn. It's too dark for a reading, don't you think?"

"Yes. Jet?" She stroked his hair.

"Yes?"

"If I let you make love to me, it won't be because I want you to become a Christian..."

"It won't?"

"No, it won't. It will be because... er... because... I love you."

"What's that sound?" He lifted his head. He would have cocked his ears if he could.

"What sound?"

“Shh! Listen.”

They listened intently, both realising simultaneously how utterly quiet the world had become. As if the diurnal creatures had gone to sleep and the nocturnal creatures were yet to stir. A minute’s silence for the earth’s abandoned babies. Elizabeth’s hand groped for Jet’s and held it tightly. Then they heard it: cheep, cheep, cheep... click, click, click..., cheep, cheep, cheep. “I don’t believe it,” said Elizabeth, “it’s the chick.”

“The what?”

“The Asil Khan, Jet, it’s hatching.” She began to unbutton her blouse.

“Are you mad? What are doing? Elizabeth, I don’t expect you to have sex with me. Don’t undress. Lizzie, I respect...”

“I’m not undressing, Jet, I’m getting the egg out of my bra. It’s beginning to hatch and it’s only due on the twenty-first. It must have begun germinating in the cubby hole of the car. It gets pretty warm in there.”

“May I get it out?”

“Yes, if you’re ever so gentle.” Her breathing picked up. She lowered her hand and submitted herself to his. “That’s the wrong side, Jet. Try the left one. Gently now.” His exploration went on rather longer than it needed to - they had begun to kiss - but at last he retrieved the egg and offered it to her. “Look,” she said, “Its little beak is poking through the crack. It should be out in half an hour. Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Aren’t you wonderful?” the boy replied. “Fancy hatching out an egg against your beautiful warm tit.”

“Breast!”

“Ok, breast. As long as you don’t try it with asp’s eggs.”

“Mrs Ripples skips that part of the play.”

“Mrs Ripples is an idiot. She’s got no right to be teaching ‘A’ level English. As for the new headmaster...”

“Where shall we put the egg, Jet? Somewhere safe and warm.”

“Let’s wrap it in some of this newspaper and put it in the kit bag.” Together they made a safe, warm place for the hatchling that was picking away at its shell and giving the occasional cheep.

“My dad will be thrilled. It’s a very rare breed, you know. He won it in a raffle.”

“What’s it called again?”

“Asil Khan. It’s an Indian Game.”

“Fighting cock?”

“Or hen.”

Jet got stuck into his second pasty while Elizabeth attacked the chocolate.

She threw out an inch of wine at the bottom of her cup and filled it with luke warm tea. Jet poured himself some more wine. They spoke little but felt very close to each other. After they had eaten and drunk their fill they lay together, on their backs, and gazed up at the sky. They held hands. They breathed in the rich nutrient smell of the dam. Finally Jet spoke: "I think I'm falling in love with you."

"Is this a game?"

"Do you mean as in Asil Khan?"

"No." She elbowed him. "I mean as in Jet Bunion."

"It's no game, Elizabeth. It was to start with. I'm ashamed of my proposal. Truly ashamed. It was selfish and cruel. I ask you to forgive me."

"There's nothing to forgive. I'm prepared to play the game, and to accept the consequences. I love you, Jet. It's unconditional. I can't stop myself. 'Tis better to have loved and lost..."

"Than never to have loved at all". Elizabeth?"

"Yes, Jet?"

"Look. The moon is rising. See that light on the horizon?"

"Yes, I see it, Jet. I see it. It's a thing of beauty."

"And a joy..."

"Forever. I love you." She touched his cheek with her fingertips.

"Elizabeth?"

"Yes, Jet?"

"I'm falling in love with you."

"My Jet."

"I am in love with you."

"Go on."

"I love you."

"Again."

"I love you." He sat up and helped her up. Then they stood up. Then they hugged each other. "Let's go home. We could get back in time for your dad to watch his baby wriggling out of its shell. Then we'll get your mom to make us a nice cup of tea. Then we'll read some poetry by candlelight. Then we'll get married or something. What do you say, honeybunch?"

"OK by me, sweetheart. Let's go."

They gathered their things, taking great care over the kit bag with its precious contents wrapped in newspaper, put on their crash helmets, shook

hands, climbed on the bike, and zoomed away, trailing the full moon behind them: a balloon left over from some New Year party.

It is New Year in Bulawayo, and anybody who is anybody is out celebrating.

Based on Alexander Pope's dictum that "those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous", *Hatchings* sets out to ridicule people of all races who abuse power - behind the pulpit, the podium, and the paint brush.

The novel, whose central metaphor is baby-dumping, is set on New Year's Eve for good reason: it's the time when powermongers are at their most self-indulgent, most exposed. It is precisely the time when we see how much alike they are. In *Hatchings* this similarity between the left and the right, between church and state, between black and white - so obsessed with their own moral worthiness, so quick to inflict their sanctimony on us all - is demonstrated by the fact that they all, quite literally, dance to the same tune.

Hatchings was chosen by Professor Anthony Chennells in the *Times Literary Supplement* as his choice of the most significant book to have come out of Africa.

"Beneath the scurrility, this is a profoundly romantic novel. It tells of a touching love story between a young white couple who are saved from the prevailing Philistinism and corruption by two things - a love of English literature and a love of the Matopos."

Terence Ranger in *The Zimbabwean Review*

"The book is about exploitation, meanness; and it's about loveliness."

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